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EMPTY BALCONY

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by

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PREFACE

THIS BOOK PRESENTS the documents in the case of Mussolini's downfall. Each phase in that grimly fascinating story has its contemporary chronicle, which here is submitted to the contemporary reader. History later will place the testimony in true perspective, and weigh it against events before and after. But we who have just lived through those two mad years between the Duce's deposition and his death are entitled to peep at this material and pass our own tentative judgement upon it.

Many witnesses are marshalled here, of varying degrees of credibility. Most are giving their evidence, at least in English, for the first time. I have tried to warn the reader when personal motives seem to lessen the value of what is stated. But on the whole the story hangs together remarkably well.

In the beginning we learn at first hand how the plot was prepared that pricked the monstrous bubble of Mussolini's personal power. The historic meeting of the Fascist Grand Council, with all its concentrated drama, is reported for the first time almost *verbatim*. The strange adventure of the Duce's captivity and rescue is recounted by eyewitnesses, and his vengeance taken at the Verona trial stands out with all the bare horror of an assize report. Among the rest comes the drama, played out against the mountains of Switzerland, of the Nazis' final betrayal of their Italian dupes. It leads to the last chapter, in which a simple parish priest, in the course of a routine report to his bishop, finds himself reporting the awful circumstances of the Dictator's end.

In these two years the ill-omened Venezia Balcony was empty. The Duce had come down from it, and no one was leading the Italian people. In the resulting chaos a whole complex of human passions were nakedly revealed, in a way we had not expected to see in this modern world. This stark

human interest clearly dominates every page of this record, even in its most apparently formal passages.

I have tried to interpose no personal judgements, except where these seem necessary to preserve or explain the thread of the narrative. If the book has any accidental theme it is the progressive deterioration in the character of Mussolini, whose descent into blood and madness was as rapid and inevitable as that of Macbeth.

Had I compiled this book to express any ideas of my own it would have dwelt on the virtues, somehow preserved intact, of the common folk of my country. I myself believe that we of the present generation of Italian people have escaped permanent contamination from the Fascist experiment, even when, not attaining to heroic virtue, we have been forced to play some part within it. I believe the Italian people have a great future.

But the people do not play any large part in this book. This is a Renaissance drama, acted by the great ones of the earth; and fortunately, having read it, we can consign it equally to an unhappy past.

I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to my fellow journalist Mr. Douglas Brown, without whose help these records could not have been compiled and presented.

P. S.

November 1945

GRACE AFTER LAMB

I have had accomplices, I have had companions,
In my days of struggle, my joyful *giovinezza*—
All, all are gone, the old familiar Faseses.

I have been swaggering, I have been parading,
Riding high, lording it over all my cronies—
All, all are gone, the old familiar Faseses.

I loved my country once, fairest among countries;
Selfish my love was; thus I have destroyed her—
All, all are gone, the old familiar Faseses.

I built an empire, waving swords of Islam,
Choking with poison gas the unsuspecting natives—
All, all has gone, like the old familiar Faseses.

I had a Freund, a kinder Freund had no man
If you believe the words of propaganda—
Now he spurns openly the old familiar Faseses.

Child of my bosom, dearest of my daughters,
Why did I let them kill your children's father?
Else we might have talked of the old familiar Faseses—

Of men I have murdered, men I have abandoned,
Men taken from me, men now turned against me—
All who have gone, like the old familiar Faseses.

D. B.

CHRONOLOGY

Political

Military

MAY, 1943

- | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|----|--------------------------------|
| 5 | Last speech
from The Balcony | 14 | End of the
African campaign |
|---|---------------------------------|----|--------------------------------|

JULY, 1943

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------------|----|---------------------------|
| 19 | Dictators meet at Feltre | 11 | Allied invasion of Sicily |
| 24 | Fascist Grand Council | | |
| 25 | Mussolini arrested | | |

AUGUST, 1943

- | | |
|----|---------------------------|
| 17 | First armistice proposals |
|----|---------------------------|

SEPTEMBER, 1943

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| 3 | Surrender signed | 3 | Invasion of mainland |
| | 8 | Armistice announced | |
| 12 | Mussolini rescued | 12 | German occupation of
Rome |
| 23 | Fascist Republic founded | | |

*Political**Military***JANUARY, 1944**

- 8 Verona trial
- 12 Verona executions
- 22 Anzio landing

JUNE, 1944

- 4 Liberation of Rome
- 6 D Day

SEPTEMBER, 1944

- 4 Allies break through
Gothic Line

NOVEMBER, 1944

- 21 Fascist Republican Army
disbanded

APRIL, 1945

- 10 Final Allied offensive
- 25 Patriot insurrection
- 28 Mussolini killed

MAY, 1945

- 1 German surrender in Italy

CHAPTER I

THE PLOT

MUSSOLINI LAST APPEARED on The Balcony on 5th May, 1943. His peroration was full of the old bombast. "In your voices," he cried, "I hear the old incorruptible faith and a supreme certainty: faith in Fascism, certainty of Victory."

There was a roar of applause, and for the moment the Duce may have caught some echoes of the old enthusiasm. But later he was to admit that the cheers of the crowd seemed "rather perturbed". After all, the Italian army had only just been driven out of Africa.

As the applause subsided the Duce withdrew, and the glass doors of the historic balcony closed behind him for ever.

Two months later the first Anglo-American troops landed on the beaches of eastern Sicily, protected by an arch of fire spread by the Allied navies from Licata to Syracuse. The invasion of Europe had started. At the same moment the headlong crash of Mussolini's dictatorship began.

The Italian public first received news of the invasion of Sicily from War Bulletin No. 1,141 on July 11th. "The enemy has tonight opened an attack on Sicily. Axis armed forces are pushing back the enemy with decision."

Italy seemed to hold her breath and wait. Next day War Bulletin No. 1,145 read: "The enemy has succeeded in crossing the inner shoreline between Licata and Augusta, reaching the mountain zone of south-eastern Sicily and advancing towards the plain of Catania."

In three days' time the defence line of Augusta and Syracuse had been shattered. Sicily had fallen. History will record as a final condemnation of the Fascist régime that the Italian people received this news with a kind of relief.

Mussolini asked Hitler for an immediate meeting, and ordered Secretary Scorza to mobilize the Party. He also decided to promote a series of public meetings in all important Italian cities. A list of speakers was drawn up. They were to appeal to

the nation to take a last stand. The list was made up of the twelve foremost Fascist names. Among them, along with those of De Bono, Teruzzi, Federzoni and Bottai, Grandi's name was included.

Dino Grandi, founder of Fascism in Bologna, happened at the time to be in that city. His last public speech there had been as long ago as the summer of 1924. Now he was asked to come to the fore in his own city once again, so as to urge his fellow citizens to continue with a war they all condemned in their hearts.

Grandi replied with a telegram—one of the fateful telegrams of history. It was the first leaf fluttering from the autumnal tree. It simply announced that Grandi declined to address the citizens of Bologna, but suggested that the Fascist Grand Council be summoned to discuss "the grave situation".

The rot had set in, and there were not a few who recognized it. De Bono, Farinacci, Teruzzi, Bottai, Acerbo and De Cicco, alarmed, went to Rome and asked Scorza to allow them to speak to the Duce. They formally requested him to summon the Grand Council, so that the situation could be faced.

The last meeting of the supreme body of the Fascist régime had been on 7th December, 1939, when it registered a decision to keep outside the war. Ever since then, even when Italy came into the war, Mussolini had always refused to summon it again.

Now, in a very bad temper, he again refused. "The Grand Council," he replied, "will meet only on the day of final victory, to communicate to the Italian people the great tidings." With an abrupt gesture, having uttered these words, he dismissed the timid delegation.

Next day, after leaving strict orders with Scorza to tighten the Party's grip on the nation and to go ahead with the public speeches, Mussolini left Rome by plane to meet Hitler at Feltre. On the same day, the Allies entered Enna, key to the defence line of the whole centre of Sicily, without firing a shot.

The two dictators met on 19th July, 1943, and talked for three hours. They were quite alone, but from both their versions of the conversation—Mussolini's memoirs and Hitler's

broadcast of 10th September, 1943—it is possible to reconstruct the general trend of the discussion, as confirmed by the events that followed.

Mussolini asked, in some desperation, for German help in pushing back the Allied invader. Hitler abruptly responded that for the effective defence of the "German fortress" he was interested only in the Po valley. Mussolini implored him to take a different view, pointing out the dangerous prospect of an Italy converted into a base for attack on Germany; and at last Hitler condescended to modify his decision. He would help, but only on condition that the conduct of all military operations in Italy was assumed by the German High Command. To this condition the Führer, as he himself declared in a radio broadcast on the day after the Italian surrender, added a piece of friendly advice to Mussolini. He told him to become a real dictator, to free himself once and for all of those survivors of liberal democracy who, sheltering behind the shield of the legal Constitution, were to be found in the midst of Fascism itself, and to grasp in his own hands all military, political and executive power. Hitler added witheringly that, while he knew that he himself could make the German nation march wherever he desired, he did not feel so sure that Mussolini could do the same, even with the Fascist Party.

It was probably in that moment that the offended dictator decided after all to convoke the Grand Council, having in mind the double purpose of showing off before the Führer by obtaining a solid vote of acclamation, and of preparing the nation to swallow the bitter pill of a German High Command in Italy by the will of Hitler.

Tragic news broke up the conference. Rome had been bombed and the myth of the Eternal City was broken. As Mussolini took leave of Hitler at the airport he said: "The cause is common, Führer," thus publicly acknowledging the German demands.

On reaching Rome on the morning of the 21st, Mussolini ordered Scorza to convoke the Fascist Grand Council for the 24th at five o'clock in the afternoon. Scorza received the telephone message in his office at 11 a.m., just as Grandi, who had arrived from Bologna, was talking to him. The Duce's

suddenly reversed decision astounded Grandi, but he saw his chance.

Grandi has told me that for some time he had been contemplating revolt. He had, he said, so long ago as June 4th, spoken to the King, who, he had discovered, was ready to act if a first step could be taken with some kind of mandate from a constitutional body.

"I am a constitutional king," he had declared. Only a constitutional vote of condemnation of the dictatorship and the legal restoration of all prerogatives and responsibilities to the Crown would allow and induce him to act.

Grandi believed that the King's support was necessary to arouse the military clique whose backing was essential. Behind the leather-padded doors of the War Ministry they had for some time been grumbling and protesting, but they had never yet dared openly to defy the dictator. Indeed, they shared with him a large part of the responsibility for the country's sorrows. Not one of them had had the courage to resist the military enterprises that Mussolini's megalomania had ordered—either the invasion of France, or the insane campaign in Greece, or the sending of the best Italian troops to certain death in the Russian steppes to cover the German retreat, or the mad Balkan adventures. If no deliberative assembly of the régime had been consulted on the eve of the declaration of the war, the generals had been consulted. So they were pretty deeply committed, and only the King could lead them out of the impasse. The way to the King led through the Fascist Grand Council, which Mussolini himself had been provoked into summoning.

The problem was to make the Grand Council vote. Time was very short. It was impossible to lay a detailed plan, or to organize an elaborate plot. Only rapid and secret action could give any results. No word must reach the King, or, above all, the military authorities.

"I could not let the King know anything," Grandi told me, chewing his short pipe nervously in the tiny living-room of the villa in Estoril where he now lives a life of retirement. "Things might have taken a bad turn—and, after all, the odds were against me—and the Crown was not to be compromised. To

have told the generals would have been rash indeed. Now that the war was going disastrously they were thoroughly inclined to abandon Mussolini, but until they were convinced that he had weakened they were quite capable of going to him and asking for my arrest and priding themselves in having uncovered the plot. Even when Mussolini was in prison they were still afraid of him; Badoglio, when already Prime Minister, with the police and the army in his hands, went to the point of sending him a kind letter of apology. I had thus to act alone, or at most with the assistance of a very few trustworthy friends."

On the afternoon of the 21st, Grandi went to the house of Federzoni, the royalist President of the Italian Academy, and a fellow Bolognese, taking a sheet of paper with him. On this paper was written the outline of his now famous Order of the Day—the Order of the Day that ended Fascism. At first sight innocent, almost humdrum, it was, as a careful second reading would reveal, a daring challenge to the dictatorship. Grandi watched breathlessly for Federzoni's reaction, when the full purport of the draft resolution dawned upon him.

The first step was successful. Federzoni handed back the paper with the words: "We must try anything and everything, even the impossible, to save the nation from total ruin." And he added: "Even if we fail in our attempt our sacrifice will be the spark that will fire a rebellion and arouse people out of their apathy."

It was not long before three more conspirators joined this cell of two. They were Bottai, Bastianini and Albini, all members of the Grand Council. They were summoned to Federzoni's villa, number 1, Via Ferdinando di Savoia, and were persuaded to add their signatures to the fateful document.

Who were these four men whom Grandi selected for the rôle of putting their shoulders to the great boulder and sending it rattling down the hill? How did they come to play this decisive part in the history of Italy?

Federzoni and Albini were both Bolognese. The former was singled out among the Fascists by his absolute devotion to the King. It was perhaps natural, in view of the peculiar part that the Monarchy played in the situation that Grandi should

approach him first. Albini, now Under-Secretary of the Interior, was a boyhood friend of Grandi; Bastianini was one of his protégés, having risen to high rank in the Foreign Ministry without possessing either the qualifications or the experience of a career diplomat.

These were, in a sense, lay figures—the necessary faithful partners in an enterprise in which Grandi, without them, would have felt terribly alone. His real colleague, however, to whom these earnest and simple men acted as a foil, was Giuseppe Bottai—a type of thoughtful Fascist of strong intelligence and personality to whom Grandi would naturally turn. Bottai, although of course conforming, was in his own right a leader of a faction in the Party. He was constitutionally opposed to totalitarianism as Mussolini understood it, and he did not like the war. He was cultivated and aloof, young and vigorous; a valuable recruit to the Fascist cause, but always a potential enemy of it from within. He and Grandi were the real begetters of the revolt.

About to fire the mine, Grandi was troubled, so he says, by a qualm of conscience. He wanted, if possible, to give the dictator a last chance to resign of his own accord.

On the evening of the 21st, with the Order of the Day in his pocket, he went to Scorza at the Fascist Party headquarters. Scorza, rather surprisingly, declared that he too would add his vote, and Grandi asked him to obtain an immediate interview with Mussolini.

On the following day, at five in the afternoon, Grandi was received by the Duce at the Palazzo Venezia. As he crossed the hall to the Duce's office, which was the assembly hall for the reunions of the Grand Council, he saw the ushers already arranging benches for the meeting. On one of them a German general sat. It was Kesselring waiting to see the Duce.

Grandi read the Order of the Day to Mussolini and besought him, for the good of the nation, to renounce his totalitarian power and restore to the King his prerogatives. Mussolini listened attentively, without interruption. The two men were standing, separated by that famous large, bare table, where Mussolini usually worked. Grandi put into his words all the impetuous ardour natural to a Bolognese peasant. Mussolini,

cold and haughty, wore that mask with which he thought to impress others of his likeness to a Roman Caesar.

Grandi finished. Anything could happen. Kesselring's presence in the hall outside was not a good sign. But Mussolini showed no violent reaction. "Even to talk of peace or of an abolition of the dictatorship is rebellion," he said, but quietly. Then he added, with a kind of remote pride: "Leave me now. We shall see one another at the Grand Council."

Grandi's attempt at persuasion had failed. He proceeded, therefore, to carry through his plan of open rebellion.

It was the 22nd, and the Grand Council was to meet in the afternoon of the 24th. Forty-eight hours remained to him to pull all the strings of the improvised conspiracy.

Grandi had to reckon on the procedure that was customarily followed at Grand Council meetings. Usually, he recalled, the Duce would open the debate with a report on the subject that the meeting had been called to discuss. Then he would allow the members to express their views, and finally would read a motion previously composed by himself, which the members would unanimously approve, and which next day would be broadcast to the nation. The problem now was to propose an Order of the Day that had not been composed by Mussolini, and to have it voted upon.

During the whole of the 23rd and the morning of the 24th Grandi and Federzoni feverishly busied themselves with a series of contacts and subtle persuasions. Carefully avoiding those whom they knew to be blindly faithful to Mussolini, they turned to Marshal De Bono, Suardo, Bignardi, Cianetti, De Stefani and Count De Vecchi. De Bono and De Vecchi were the only two survivors of the *Quadriviri* who directed the March on Rome in 1922. Suardo was President of the Senate, Bignardi was President of the Fascist Agricultural Association, Cianetti was Minister of Corporations, and De Stefani a former Minister of Finance. In the end, all six promised their adherence, but would not accept the responsibility of taking any definite action during the session unless the debate took a favourable turn.

Then the problem of appealing to Ciano had to be faced. Grandi, who was not then on good terms with Ciano, was of

the opinion that it was preferable to leave him out of the conspiracy, owing to his family ties with the Duce. Bottai, however, insisted on playing for the high stake of binding to the cause the very son-in-law of the Duce, Italian Fascist Number Two.

During the afternoon of the 23rd, Grandi and Ciano met at Bottai's home. Their conversation was long, and clouded by an atmosphere of mutual distrust that Bottai tried to clear. Finally Ciano left without having reached any decision, but declaring that he would study the question and give an answer later. On the following morning he came to Grandi's office at the Chamber of Deputies to offer his adherence. Dino Alfieri, Italian Ambassador to Berlin, came with him, also promising his support.

The situation at midday of the 24th was as follows:

Twenty-eight members were to take part in the session of the Grand Council. Grandi could count for certain on ten of them. Five or six would blindly follow Mussolini no matter what turn events should take, and the fate of Italy lay with an amorphous group whose opinion and reaction it was impossible to foretell.

Would the dictator's fascination succeed in conquering them or would Grandi be able to win them over? The fact that the Grand Council had not met for nearly four years led to a lack of contact between many of the members, which rendered any precise calculation out of the question. The game was an audacious one, and to some seemed desperate, but it was to be played.

On the afternoon of the 24th, amid the indifference of the passing crowds, some motor-cars rolled up the Corso Umberto I towards the Palazzo Venezia, driving through a side entrance into the spacious courtyard. They brought the players in the last act of Italy's twenty-year tragedy. The stage was set; the curtain was about to rise.

CHAPTER II

‘‘CAESAR WITH A SENATE AT HIS HEELS’’

IT IS NOT only as a conspirator that Giuseppe Bottai has deserved well of history. He has recorded for us, carefully and objectively and almost verbatim, one of the most momentous assemblies of all time.

A caprice of the historic muse has caused the death of Italian Fascism, that system of rigid authority and violence, to be expressed in the proceedings of a debate. Not often do great movements and events so crystallize themselves within the measurable compass of an hour or so round a table within a given room. When that happens posterity is fortunate if there is a scribe at hand ready to record objectively what he sees. Such a scribe was Giuseppe Bottai, at that epochmaking meeting of the Fascist Grand Council which ended Fascism, on the night of the 24th July, 1943.

There have been several accounts of these proceedings. Mussolini has described them, in brief, in a self-justificatory article in the *Corriere della Sera* and in his book *The Stick and the Carrot*. Dino Grandi has supplied another short version in some equally self-justificatory articles he wrote for the *Daily Express*. Others of the Twenty Eight have dropped a hint here and there, from which rumour has taken vague shape and grown. But only Bottai made constant notes, only he seemed concerned to put together a report which had no other object than to record what actually happened, without fear or favour.

On this sudden occasion there was no official minute taken by the Secretary of the Party. Even if there had been, it is likely to have been more official than accurate. But Bottai, youngest of the Twenty Eight, was helped in his unexpectedly momentous task by the recollections of some of his colleagues, notably Ciano and Grandi. He edited them as carefully as time allowed; then, in the confusion that followed, he disappeared.

Sentenced *in absentia* to life imprisonment by Badoglio's courts, he fought under an assumed name with regular Italian troops alongside the Allies in the last stages of the campaign of Italy. Then he found it more convenient to go completely underground. But his document remains, and from it one can reconstruct in detail that amazing meeting of high Fascists at which it became apparent that Fascism no longer existed. It is on this report that I base the following account of the first dramatic episode in the story of the end of an era.

Other contemporary records have set the scene. Outwardly it was a calm afternoon in Rome, and neither the public nor high officials of the Party were aware that anything untoward was afoot.

Cracks in the façade had, as we said, long been visible. The Allies were already in the heart of Sicily. Rumours of highly placed dissatisfaction at the conduct of the war had been current for some time. The newspapers themselves had voiced them, and the very leader of Fascism's most fanatical faction, Roberto Farinacci of Cremona (nicknamed "the *Gauleiter*" because of his devotion to the Führer) had written a series of articles in the *Regime Fascista* demanding an inquest on the Italian General Staff, denouncing them as responsible for the military defeats of the army.

Bignardi, one of the members of the Fascist Grand Council who came to vote against Mussolini, thus described the true atmosphere of Italy at the time of the Allied invasion in a letter to Mussolini written in the following November to justify his vote:

"The political situation had in July become more and more confused owing to inefficiency, bad faith and corruption. The masses were eluding the control of the Fascist syndicates. My colleagues and I were making desperate efforts to enforce discipline, and perhaps in this respect we succeeded, but faith, loyalty and sincerity were rapidly diminishing.

"Towards the end we were living in an atmosphere charged with electricity, and the possibility of a mass rebellion had to be seriously taken into consideration. I am not exaggerating. One had only to mix with people on trains, in trams, at meetings of the highest personalities, in journalistic circles, to hear

complaints against the loathed régime, its institutions, its leaders—in every one of whom a profiteer was recognized—and even against the Duce himself.

“In face of this state of affairs the Party seemed completely powerless. Military reverses contributed to aggravate the internal situation. The loss of Pantelleria and the invasion of Sicily raised a storm in every soul.”

But, in spite of all these signs, Fascism to the average Italian had come to seem eternal, coexistent, that is to say, with Italy herself. Very few people could have formulated in their own minds any possible process by which the Duce might be removed. Fascism was still “ticking over”.

Hardly any passers-by in the Piazza Venezia that night spared a glance for the famous Balcony, whence Italy for twenty years had been brazenly urged along the path of illusory and fatal grandeur. Normally, since the Grand Council was meeting, the pennant of the Fascist Old Guard should have been flying there, but it remained in its red leather case in Fascist headquarters. Not even the Duce's own Musketeers were on duty; they had been sent to the front in response to public opinion that in this national emergency the toughest troops of all should certainly take their share of the dangers of the common soldier. Two fully armed battalions of Black-shirts had taken their place, and were drawn up in the courtyard. It was their presence which caused Albini, Under-Secretary of the Interior, when he arrived, to commit the first positive revolutionary act. He telephoned for a battalion of Carabinieri to camp in the square, with the idea that they might counteract any action by the Blackshirts. These two potentially rival bodies of men remained thus side by side all night, completely ignorant of the rôles supposedly assigned to them, while Fascism was being overthrown.

So the Twenty Eight assembled. Some already were self-confessed conspirators, with Grandi resolved to play the part of Brutus. Some, from recent whispers, feared a crisis; others hoped for one. Most were merely anxious, knowing how badly the war was going.

Giuseppe Bottai had his own part to play in the meeting. But he was also the self-appointed historian of the occasion,

and we turn now to the dispassionate report attributed to him.

It begins, with dramatic simplicity, by formally recording the names of the participants. "The Duce, presiding, declared the session opened at a quarter past five of the clock. Present: Mussolini, De Bono, De Vecchi, Scorza (secretary), Suardo, Grandi, De Marsico, Acerbo, Biggini, Pareschi, Federzoni, Polverelli, Cianetti, Galbiati, Bastianini, Ciano, Tringali-Casanova, Farinacci, Bottai, Albini, Alfieri, De Stefani, Rossoni, Buffarini-Guidi, Frattari, Marinelli, Gottardi, Balella, Bignardi."

Bottai does not tell us how Mussolini looked when face to face with the men who were about to turn against him. Grandi has described him as displaying no particular emotion, but looking very tired.

Though the others were in Fascist uniform, the Duce was dressed as Commandant General of the Militia.

"After Scorza had finished the roll call," continues Bottai, "Mussolini opened the discussion, basing his long speech on written notes which from time to time he read aloud."

The Duce began by making the startling statement "*Today I am perhaps the most hated man in Italy*". He outlined the military situation, which, he said, had reached a point that everyone would once have thought impossible—the beginning of an invasion of Italian metropolitan territory.

"In such a situation," the Duce said, "it is logical that elements hostile to the Fascist régime should be rallying against us, either openly or secretly. There are evident symptoms of demoralization, particularly among the middle classes, who see their personal privileges endangered. That is why I am perhaps the most hated man in Italy today. There may be a certain logic if such a hatred were felt by the ignorant masses, which are exhausted, suffering, starved and under continual enemy bombing. But there is less logic in the hostility of certain political and military circles whose responsibility is as great as my own. These circles are doing a lot of talking, and are protesting in whispers against the fact that supreme military and political power is in my hands.

"Let us consider the history of this so much discussed 'Single Command'. It was not I who wanted it. It was Marshal Badoglio who suggested it in a proposal to the King. I have

a letter here addressed to me from Marshal Badoglio dated 3rd May, 1940 (protocol 5372) which makes this quite clear. I also have a notification dated 4th June, 1940 (protocol 5569) in which the Marshal informs the General Staff, the Foreign Minister and the Colonial Governors of this proposal of his."

Mussolini proceeded to read the two documents. In the first Badoglio, who "is proud of having always faithfully served the Duce", proposed a new organization of the Supreme Military Command with Mussolini at its head. In the second, after a detailed description of the function of army, navy and air force commands in war, the Marshal states: "The Organization of the Supreme Command of the armed forces is based on the following principles: 1, totality of command personally invested in Mussolini by command of the King; 2, strategic direction of the war and coordination of action between the various arms by order of the Duce and Chief of Staff [Badoglio]; 3, direct command of all the armed forces by the Chief of Staff or by superior officers; 4, absolute loyalty and obedience to the Duce in all acts and thoughts according to Fascist custom and tradition."

Here Bottai ventures upon one of his rare comments. Having read these documents, he says, the Duce continued "with an extraordinary confession of impotence and incapacity in directing the war".

This is what Mussolini went on to say:

"The functioning of the Supreme Command has been characterized by reticence, equivocation and lies. Lies especially have dominated the conduct of this war. I am the Supreme Commander, but the only battle that I really directed in person was that of Pantelleria which happened during the absence of Marshal Cavallero, whom I acquit of all responsibility. I myself gave the order to surrender when Admiral Pavesi telegraphed me that all resistance on the island had become useless. It is only Stalin and the Emperor of Japan who can give the order to resist to the last man. Besides, Pantelleria was my invention. Until 1935 it was known only to the police." (It was a prison for political internees.) "It was my work, and I could dispose of it as I wished."

The Duce then went back further into history, and discussed

the defeat of El Alamein. "I guessed," he said, "that the English would attack on October 28th, so as to celebrate, with their sinister humour, the twentieth anniversary of Fascism." He placed all responsibility for the defeat on Rommel, whom he described as "a magnificent tactical commander but deplorable in strategy".

Next, according to Bottai, Mussolini praised fulsomely the support Germany had given to the Italians, quoting a large number of documents which he fished from a voluminous dispatch case. He said that up to 1st April, 1943, Germany had sent 40,000,000 tons of coal, 2,500,000 tons of metal, 22,000 tons of synthetic rubber, 220,000 tons of aviation spirit and 21,000 tons of fuel oil. On the same date there were in action in Italy 1,500 German guns.

"The defeatists," he continued, "say the heart of the people is not in this war. Perhaps. But the truth is that a war is only popular when it is won, and very unpopular when things go badly. In any case, whether it is popular or not doesn't matter. It isn't what people have in their hearts which matters, but what they do. No one can deny that the majority of the Italian people are neither firmly led nor severely disciplined. That is what counts."

Mussolini arrived at the conclusion of his speech:

"Here is the problem—war or peace? Unconditional surrender or resistance to the last? I admit that certain circles, more especially the highest ones, are not enthusiastic for the war. But what war has ever been popular? This war has been described as a Fascist war. But every war must be that of the party in power. If this is Mussolini's war that of 1859 was Cavour's.¹ The fact is that England wants a century of European domination so as to assure her five meals a day. She wishes to occupy Italy so as to keep our country for ever under her domination. All the rest is humbug."

There were, then, some minutes of silence. This was broken at last by Marshal De Bono, who launched a sentimental defence of the army and dared to challenge Mussolini's statements about the responsibility of military chiefs. "There is

¹ Count Camillo di Cavour was Prime Minister of Piedmont during the Wars of Independence of Italy in 1859-61.

always a political responsibility," he said. "It is the responsibility for the choice of military chiefs."

Farinacci (former Secretary of the Party and leader of the ultra-Germanophiles) complained of the hostility and mistrust which certain official circles manifested against the Germans. He concluded with a paean of praise of German might.

De Vecchi—one of the two surviving *Quadrumviri*, a Piedmontese well on in years, and blindly devoted to the King—hotly replied by accusing Farinacci of avoiding military service in the first European war, and of later posing as an Abyssinian war hero after having lost a hand in an accident while fishing. He added that several Generals and other high officers were tired and permeated with defeatism, and that their influence had lowered morale among the troops.

The discussion certainly appeared to be wandering from the point when Bottai himself, according to his own report, rose to lead it back to its true objective.

He believed that, contrary to the opinion of the General Staff, the enemy, after occupying Sicily would embark on an invasion of Italy proper. The problem which arose was consequently the following: "Is Italy ready to receive the shock?" Addressing Mussolini he said, "You have given us in your speech the definite impression that a technically efficacious defence of the Peninsula is virtually impossible. Your report was the last blow given to illusions which might have remained with us. The direct consequence of your words is this: to our recognized technical incapacity to absorb the shock of invasion we must add a damaged system of command." Turning to his colleagues he said: "I leave it to you all to draw your own conclusions."

Other reports do not confirm that Bottai was as bold or uncompromising at this juncture, and we must allow him some little exaggeration in reporting his own speech. But it undoubtedly served as the prelude for the momentous challenge thrown down by Grandi, who at this point rose gravely to address the Council.

"I am going to repeat here before the Grand Council," he said, "what I already told the Duce the day before yesterday, and I propose the following Order of the Day."

In a loud voice he read the document, now famous, calling upon the Grand Council "to proclaim the sacred duty of all Italians to defend at all costs the unity, independence and liberty of the country, the fruits of the sacrifices and endeavours of four generations from the *Risorgimento* until the present day, and the existence and future of the Italian people; and to assert that to this end it is necessary immediately to re-establish all the organs of the State, attributing to the Crown, the Grand Council, the Government, Parliament and the Corporations all the responsibilities laid down by law and the Constitution; and to invite the Head of the Government to beg His Majesty the King, to whom the whole nation turns with heartfelt fidelity and trust, to take over the actual command of all armed forces, land, sea and air, in accordance with Article V of the Constitution of the Kingdom,¹ as well as the supreme initiative in all matters entrusted to him by our institutions which in the course of our national history have always been the glorious inheritance of the noble House of Savoy."

The bomb had burst. The dictatorship had been challenged under the veil of clever words. But the Duce remained impenetrable. His firm expression did not change.

Grandi explained his Order of the Day with spirit, almost with violence. He made no attempt to conceal its real meaning, and spared no arguments against the dictatorship and its degeneration.

"You," he said, pointing an accusing finger at the Duce, "you have imposed on Italy a dictatorship that is historically immoral. You gradually, day by day, have suppressed our liberties and robbed us of our rights. Your dictatorship willed this war. Your dictatorship has lost it. The Chief we loved has disappeared. In his place there is today the gold-laced puppet invented by that foolish madman Starace.

"Take from your cap that ridiculous Marshal's badge that you so inelegantly awarded to yourself.² Try to become again the Mussolini of olden days.

¹Article V reads: "The King is the supreme head of the State. He commands all forces on land and sea. He shall declare war and conclude peace treaties."

² Following the invasion of Abyssinia and the declaration of the Italian Empire, Mussolini created the rank of "Marshal of the Empire". This rank was attributed only to himself and to the King.

"But you cannot. It is too late. By your folly and by our weakness we have come to see the destinies of a great people treated like private affairs.

"It is not enough that you take the responsibility. We are all responsible, and it is the country which pays. We, members of the Grand Council, have become powerless puppets. When you have to choose someone for an important position you deliberately select the worst. Look at that one" (pointing to Polverelli, Minister of the Press, and former Rome correspondent of Mussolini's Milanese newspaper the *Popolo d'Italia*), "there is an example for you. He has just ordered the newspapers to write neither about the wars of Italian Independence, nor about Vittorio Veneto, nor about the Piave. For seventeen years you yourself have kept the three Service Ministries, and what have you done? You have destroyed the spirit of our armed forces."

After having spoken in this vein for an hour and a half, Grandi concluded: "Among the phrases which you have ordered to be written on all the walls of Italy there is one which you pronounced in 1924: 'Perish all factions, even our own, provided the nation survives.' Today the moment has arrived. The faction must perish."

The narrator notes the pallor of Mussolini. He did not call his Blackshirts to arrest this impertinent challenger. Instead he drew himself up in his leather chair, unbuttoning his waistcoat. Some words pronounced in a low voice are noted by Bottai: "Decidedly Fate has turned her back on me."

After a moment's breathless silence Polverelli rose to speak. He chose this moment to make a "personal statement", pointing out that all his orders to the Press had previously been approved by Mussolini. Nobody listened to him.

Next it was Ciano's turn. The former Foreign Minister, son-in-law of Mussolini, affirmed that the necessity of continuing the war until they could fight no longer was beyond discussion. But, since the Duce had referred to the question of fidelity to Alliances and to the given word he thought it would be useful to refer to the history of the Italo-German alliance.

"Germany demanded it twice," he said. The first time was in 1938 during the Naples naval review. It was then that

Mussolini, trying to avoid a definite reply, took refuge in vague assurances. The second attempt was in 1939, when Mussolini accepted the alliance in the hope of diverting Germany from a course that was leading to war. Hitler promised not to give rise to questions which might provoke a war. But already (Ciano pointed out) the German General Staff had fixed the date for the attack on Poland.

Ciano continued by recalling the Salzburg interview in August 1939 when he was bearer of a letter from Mussolini to Hitler painting the Italian military situation in such a way as to encourage the opening of hostilities not earlier than 1943.

"You have never hidden anything from our Ally," said Ciano, addressing Mussolini, "but today she does not repay you with the same loyalty. On the contrary, in all their engagements with us the Germans have fired before the moment fixed. Throughout the whole war they have never ceased to present us with *faits accomplis*. All attacks since that on Poland were communicated to us only after they had begun. The evening that Belgium was invaded I was dining with Ambassador Mackensen and stayed with him until midnight; nevertheless I knew nothing until they rang me up at four in the morning to tell me that German troops had crossed the frontier. Ambassador Bismarck announced the invasion of Russia in the same fashion."

Ciano's speech appeared to be preparing the way for a break with Germany. All the accusations of treachery which the Germans might bring against Italy he declared could as well be brought against them. "We are not the traitors; we are the betrayed."

Farinacci replied with a passionate defence of the Germans, praising their power and good faith. He finished with proposing an Order of the Day opposed to Grandi's reaffirming Italian solidarity with National Socialist Germany. Even he, however, advocated the restitution "in this solemn hour for the Fatherland" of military power to the King.

But this was treachery. It was afterwards revealed that Farinacci's intentions were to oblige the King (under "gentle" German pressure) to redelegate his military powers to Kesselring. Once his intrigue was nipped in the bud, Farinacci did

not even wait to see what followed. Next day, before the results of the Grand Council session were publicly known, Farinacci was already in a Nazi plane flying towards Germany.

The debate next took on an unexpectedly legalistic colour. The Minister of Justice, De Marsico, made a long and technical defence of the constitutional propriety of Grandi's Order of the Day. Biggini on the other hand with equal forensic skill, argued that it was *ultra vires*.

Bottai does not waste much space over these dry discussions. He turns to Mussolini, who at this stage again intervened in the debate. "His voice was low, humble, almost pathetic. The arrogance of the Dictator had given way to the submission of the accused. 'What good?' he asked, 'are these reproaches now that we are alone and face to face with the power of three empires?'"

But the Duce was almost ignored as the debate took its fitful course. De Marsico supported Grandi's Order of the Day on the ground that "a return to the spirit and not only the letter of the Constitution would strengthen as nothing else could our national conscience in this supreme hour".

Scorza decided to try to gain time. He said it was growing late and suggested that the discussion be adjourned to the morrow. Mussolini eagerly supported this plan. Holding his stomach he said he was unwell and must avoid overstrain. "If," he added, "last time I was ill my doctors hadn't looked after me so well none of you would have been here this evening to take part in this aimless discussion."

Grandi saw the trap and sprang to his feet. "No, no," he said. "I oppose this absolutely. Many times in the past you have kept us here until dawn discussing the Labour Charter or some other less urgent thing.¹ Tonight we do not leave until we have discussed and voted upon my Order of the Day. It is the existence of the country which is at stake."

Mussolini, with a weary gesture, said, "Very well, let us continue", and the session went on.

Federzoni refuted Mussolini's affirmation that all wars are unpopular. "This one is, indeed, because of that unhappy

¹ The Labour Charter was the Fascist "Constitution of rights and duties of the production forces of the nation". It was proclaimed by the Fascist Grand Council in its session of 21st April, 1927.

formula 'The Fascist War' which has divided the nation, but the Libyan war and above all that of 1915-18 were not unpopular."

It was now twelve minutes past midnight, when there was a brief pause in the proceedings. Mussolini, followed by Scorza, retired to his office while the other members of the Grand Council dispersed around the room, discussing earnestly among themselves. Grandi profited by the interval to collect signatures to his Order of the Day.

A buffet had been prepared in one corner of the room, but nobody went near it. Only Suardo downed a hearty glass of brandy in one gulp.

Suddenly the dictator's voice bellowed forth: "Alfieri!" Fascism's Ambassador to Berlin, deathly pale, dashed across the room to the dictator's office. He emerged a moment or so later, and the others crowded around him. "I can't understand it!" he whispered. "He merely asked me what they think of him in Germany!"

"Nothing more?" questioned Grandi astounded.

"Not another word."

At twenty-five minutes past midnight Mussolini returned and the session recommenced.

Bastianini, Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs, discussed the home situation. He stressed the moral depression of the people of Sicily, declaring that this was one of the factors that had determined the rapid Italian defeat in the island.

Here Mussolini interrupted to say: "I myself stated the Sicilian problem long ago. Last year I ordered the prefect of Catania to lock up all those who were idling about the town and to have everyone shot who abandoned his post during the air raids."

Bastianini ignored the interruption and continued:

"There is an unbridgeable gap between the Party and the nation. The nation is always on strike, a ca'canny strike of obstruction. Perhaps it is already too late for a revision of principle which could change the aspect and the soul of Fascism."

Discussing foreign affairs Bastianini referred to a plan he presented at the time of the Salzburg interview. "We were wrong," he said, "not to cultivate our contacts with the nations

of Western Europe, who, like ourselves, are intolerant of Nazi destruction. Perhaps in this way there is still the possibility of a solution."

Three Councillors next spoke against Grandi's Order of the Day. They were Tringali-Casanova (President of the Fascist Special Tribunal), Biggini (Minister of Education) and Galbiati (Chief of Staff of the Fascist Militia). Galbiati concluded his speech: "All Italians are united round the Duce. If there is any division it exists between you" (pointing to Grandi, Bastianini and Bottai) "and the people. What matters deficiency of armament when one has the will to fight? If this will is not to be found above it is obvious enough below."

Mussolini picked up his spirits somewhat at this speech and decided to speak again.

"Among the accusations that you make against the régime," he said, "you forget the one most current on the lips of the people—the fabulous enrichment of several among you." Tapping his despatch case he continued: "I have enough here to send you all to the gallows. You more than anyone," he said, pointing to Ciano. "When you entered my house it was treason that entered."

He picked up a copy of the proposed Order of the Day. "This raises some very grave problems of personal dignity," he said. "If the King accepts the restoration of military powers that means my execution. Let us speak frankly. I am sixty years old and I know what such a defeat means in such a moment. But beware. If tomorrow the King renews the confidence in me which he has never yet denied, what will be your position, gentlemen, before the King, before the country, before the Party and still more before me personally? Besides I have in my hands the key to solve the war situation, although you know nothing about it."

Grandi rose and cried, "The Duce is blackmailing us. He is forcing us to choose between our old fidelity to his person and our devotion to the fatherland. We cannot hesitate a moment, gentlemen. It is the fatherland."

The session had reached its critical point. Scorza rose and cried to Mussolini: "You haven't known how to be dictator enough. You have been more disobeyed than any man in this

century." He went on to exalt the Party, expressing a blind faith in the Party-educated youth, and concluded by presenting a rival Order of the Day, proclaiming resistance to the death and demanding immediate constitutional and military reforms by enforcing the dictatorship.

At this point Bottai declares that it was impossible to maintain his connected account of the procedure. Everyone talked at once; everyone hurled insults. Scorza proposed his Order of the Day in his capacity as Secretary of the Party; whereupon Bastianini cried: "Why do you do so? To declare us traitors if we don't vote for you? It is blackmail."

Then Ciano addressed Scorza. "It is you who will go to Fort Boccea; not we."

Fort Boccea is the place of executions.

Tringali-Casanova, President of the Special Tribunal, shouted: "You will pay with your heads for this treachery."

Little by little order was restored. De Bono, who had taken no part in the shouting, rose to defend energetically the army and the General Staff. "The army," he said, "in this national morass is the sole guarantee of a real continuity of tradition and loyalty."

De Stefani, former Minister of Finance, said a clear distinction should be drawn between régime and country. "Only the country should inspire supreme decisions. You cannot win a war like this merely by mobilizing the Party."

Farinacci continued violently to defend his own Order of the Day, while Bignardi and Alfieri declared they would vote for Grandi's Order of the Day.

Then Suardo, President of the Senate, rose in tears to declare that he withdrew his signature from the Grandi resolution and to pray the others to vote for the Scorza substitute. He was followed by Cianetti, Minister of Corporations, who began to express the same doubts.

Ciano, in that crucial moment, seemed to waver. He made a new proposition: to nominate a commission to study both Grandi's and Scorza's Orders of the Day and devise a third that would take into consideration the diverse tendencies and combine them.

Grandi's supporters trembled. If this proposition went over they had lost.

Bottai cannot resist mentioning himself as the one who rallied the forces of freedom at this critical juncture. This is what he says he said:

"For two days I haven't eaten, I haven't slept. I have been thinking before taking my decision. Now, if I withdraw my signature, I would not regard myself as a man."

He did not however convince Polverelli, who declared: "I was born, and I will die, Mussolini's man."

Then Grandi spoke again, and Biggini, Pareschi, and Buffarini-Guidi; but the debate had lost its thread. At this moment, with Suardo's withdrawal and the hesitations of Ciano and Cianetti, it seemed as though Grandi's was the losing game. He admits this in his version of the historic assembly. Perhaps Mussolini felt the same—or was he tired? At any rate, with a gesture of complete indifference he ordered Scorza to read the roll call and put the question to the vote.

Suardo abstained, and Farinacci, still true to his German masters, said he would only vote for his own Order of the Day. Scorza, breaking his promise, supported Mussolini, and was followed by Biggini, Polverelli, Tringali-Casanova, Frat-tari, Buffarini-Guidi and Galbiati.

The following Nineteen voted for Grandi's Order of the Day: Grandi, Federzoni, De Bono, De Vecchi, Ciano, De Marsico, Acerbo, Pareschi, Cianetti, Balella, Gottardi, Big-nardi, De Stefani, Rossoni, Bottai, Marinelli, Alfieri, Bastianini and Albini.

It was the formal registration of the end of Fascism in Italy.

Mussolini rose painfully and asked: "Who is to present this Order of the Day to the King?" Grandi replied, "That's for you to do."

Mussolini said, "That's all. I think we can go now. You have brought about a crisis in the régime. The session is closed."

While Mussolini walked towards his study Scorza in accordance with ritual, cried: "Long live the Duce." Only Polverelli replied.

It was forty-two minutes past two of the morning of 25th July, 1943. The assembly dispersed. The sentries whose heavy tread awakened echoes in the deserted corridors of the Palazzo Venezia were mounting guard over the tomb of Fascism.

INTO THE SHADOWS

DICTATORS CANNOT TEMPORIZE. They cannot argue, defend themselves or make out a case. If they do so, they are lost.

Mussolini was lost on the day before the meeting of the Fascist Grand Council, at the moment when Grandi showed him in advance the text of his Order of the Day. He failed to act then, and he equally failed to act afterwards.

Physically, he could have acted easily enough. It would have been simple to arrest Grandi on July 23rd. It would have been simple during the Grand Council meeting to rally the Blackshirts on duty in the corridors of the Palazzo Venezia and do away with the nineteen unarmed and undecided opponents. Even on the following day, as we shall see, when Rome and Italy still knew nothing of the Grand Council's vote, there was nothing to prevent Mussolini from summoning the blindly obedient mechanized division of Blackshirts camping in nearby Bracciano, and from turning for decisive help to the German Gestapo and SS already sufficiently numerous in Italy. The Italian masses were not yet conscious of their own strength in opposing the Party, nor of the weakness of the Fascist organization. Those men who had acted under the impulse of the moment, without proper plan or organization, driven by the need of doing something to save the country from total ruin, trembled, most of them, in fear of the consequences of the responsibility they had assumed. Some, like Cianetti, who wrote next day a letter of apology to Mussolini which was to save him from death at the Verona trial, were ready to withdraw their votes and express their regret for having dared attack him who, as was written on all the walls of Italy, was "always right". The generals behind them—Badoglio, Ambrosio and Roatta—did not have sufficient forces at hand for an out and out military revolt. If Mussolini, leaving the Grand Council, had mobilized his Blackshirts, ordered the arrest of

about thirty persons, declared a state of emergency, and gone to the King at the head of ten battalions, instead of accompanied by his secretary, the *coup d'état* would not have taken place.

What was it that held him back? Ignorance? Fear? The noble intention of preventing a civil struggle in Italy?

I believe it was none of these things. All the accounts of these fatal days that are available suggest to me that Mussolini was the victim of his own megalomania, and that he really thought that any revolt against his authority was bound in nature to fail. He had enjoyed—and had suffered from—twenty years of adulation. He was convinced that other men of his calibre did not, nor could, exist. Psychologically, therefore, he was unarmed and helpless. "All power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely." It also weakens.

Glance again through Bottai's *procès verbal*. Is it not clear that the Duce did not take the Council's challenge seriously? He was on the defensive, it is true; but that was because the war was going badly. He would equally have been on the defensive if he had been addressing a well-drilled crowd from the neighbouring balcony. As Leader, there were certain things he had to explain—not completely, perhaps, but well enough to satisfy his followers' lesser intelligences. He condescended to argue, rather listlessly, with the Fascist Grand Council. He did not realize, in his egotism, that, for him, to argue was to abdicate.

"You have brought about a crisis in the régime." Those were his last words. And by that I do not think he meant that his own power was seriously challenged. He meant that the Council had failed him, that there would have to be another "changing of the guard", that he would have a lot of troublesome shifting about to do in the hierarchy. "A crisis in the régime." Not a crisis for Mussolini.

This point is proved, I think, by the course of events next day. Fortunately we have Mussolini's own account of how he passed those hours, so fatal for him and for Italy.

It was Sunday, and the morning dawned serene. After breakfast, the Commander of the Militia, General Galbiati, reported to him, and assured him the situation was normal. After all,

he never expected it to be otherwise. Then came the Under-Secretary for the Interior, Albini, with his routine report. The night's tidings from him consisted of the R.A.F.'s bombing of Bologna. Then the Japanese Ambassador, Hidaka, called, to discuss long term questions, and the talk turned on the Duce's meeting with Hitler at Feltre some days before. A certain General Castellano, whom we shall meet later in a very different capacity, came to bring the daily war communiqué. It was a bulletin of defeat, and Mussolini, having corrected some words, signed it with an irate scratch of his pen.

So much for the morning—the first morning of a dictator who was doomed. After luncheon, accompanied by General Galbiati, Mussolini visited a poor quarter of Rome, Tiburtino, which had been badly damaged in a raid six days before. The police had done their work well, and among the homeless people searching for their belongings among the ruins there were enough agents to shout "Alalà" to make everything appear normal.

Mussolini's appointment with the King was for later that afternoon. It must have been with feelings of contempt for the unruly and unrepresentative Grand Council that he returned to occupy the intervening hours with his mistress Claretta Petacci.

At five o'clock, accompanied only by his secretary De Cesare, he drove to the Villa Ada, where King Victor Emmanuel was awaiting him.

His Majesty was alone, wearing the service uniform of a marshal. Though the Duce did not know it, the King had already made his decision, and was fully prepared for the first act of the tragedy which was to reach its conclusion nearly two years later in the Piazzale Loreto in Milan.

What had happened has been described to me by Grandi.

When, at three that morning, the Grand Council had risen and Mussolini had stalked off contemptuously to bed, Grandi had hastened to his office in the Chamber of Deputies where the "Count-Duke" Acquarone, the King's Chamberlain, was

waiting for him. And this, as Grandi has since related to me, is what he told that faithful servant:

"Our purpose was to obtain for the Sovereign a resolution and vote of a constitutional body that would legally deprive the dictator of his powers. Having obtained that, we have done our duty. Now it is for His Majesty to do his. The régime's supreme Assembly has condemned the dictatorship and asked the King to restore the Constitution. If the King decides, as we advise him, to dismiss Mussolini, he will have the entire Italian people around him. Along with Mussolini the whole totalitarian régime will crash. But to prevent a show of force by Mussolini backed by the Germans and their bayonets there is not a moment to lose. The King's decision, we must remember, will be followed by an immediate German reaction. We must forestall this by creating the accomplished fact of peace with the Allies. It may also be that the Germans will decide to declare a state of war between Italy and Germany, but in that case Italy will automatically find herself lined up with the Allies."

Grandi likes it to be understood that he took a pro-Allied line from the start, even against the opposition of a man like the Count-Duke, who thought that after the fall of Fascism Italy could revert to a position of neutrality.

"Italy cannot get out of the war by doing nothing," is what he says he told mild Acquarone at this meeting in the dead of night. "We must contact the Allies as soon as possible and make peace with them."

"But who can inherit the responsibility and weight of the Government?" Acquarone asked. "Who do you suggest proposing to the King as successor?"

Grandi says that for a while he remained silent. Many things depended upon the name of the successor. Above all, a man who was not tied to the recent past was needed—one who had given nothing and received nothing from Mussolini.

The *coup d'état* had certainly gone off rather at half cock. Nothing had been prearranged. There had been no plot, no organizing. Perhaps here lay one of the reasons of success. But now the only organization that could be put into action was the military clique. They were used to planning, to arranging

mobilizations. They had already in their desk drawers a "plan of mobilization for assuming and guaranteeing public order in the event of the Dictator's disappearance". Grandi suspected this, and he knew that the military authorities would take no steps without the King's order. The King, in turn, had told Grandi during their interview on June 4th that he was a "constitutional monarch and could not act unless a constitutional body gave him the power so to do".

So the name was at last found. "Marshal Caviglia," said Grandi. "Propose Marshal Caviglia. He is in no way compromised. He is one of the victors of Vittorio Veneto. He is known to have been anti-Fascist all along. He is a soldier. He is the man we need. Tell the King that, and tell him to be quick, as quick as he possibly can."¹

"And you, what's to become of you?"

"My gesture of tonight is the last of my political life. I have played the part of Tallien to the Italian Robespierre. I have finished."

Thus Grandi's account of his historic meeting with the timid Court functionary, as dawn was breaking over Rome. The Palace Minister went to his sovereign. Grandi was never again to see the King. A few days afterwards—the only member of the Grand Council to leave Italy licitly—he was in Spain on his way to finding refuge in Portugal where to this day he lives in poverty with his family in a small house by the sea. He had done his job in overthrowing the Dictator. There was no place for him in Italy. Even his last proposal to the King was not accepted. The name of Caviglia was substituted by that of Badoglio, who for years had been awaiting his chance.

The King was not idle in the hours that followed his nocturnal interview with Acquarone. Not for him a lordly tour

¹ Caviglia had always been one of Badoglio's most bitter enemies. In a book he accused Badoglio of being mainly responsible for the famous defeat of Caporetto in 1917. He had never wished to take any part in the Fascist régime and lived in retirement until September 10, 1943, when he assumed charge of the troops in Rome for twenty-four hours in a last, and unsuccessful, attempt to hold out against the Germans. He died in solitude in the summer of 1945.

of bombed-out areas, or dalliance in a mistress's villa. In the morning he discussed with General Ambrosio the details of a daring project—nothing less than the arrest of Mussolini. He prepared with Marshal Badoglio certain proclamations and press communiqués.

And then at five o'clock, the King's A.D.C., Colonel Torella di Romagnano, approached. "Your Majesty, Mr. Mussolini asks to be received."

Mr. Mussolini entered, dictator no longer, wearing a blue suit, carrying his gloves in his left hand, ready for the royal handshake. Was he perhaps already feeling the first qualms?

There followed a conversation which lasted a brief twenty minutes—a conversation decisive in the history of the modern world. Twenty final irrevocable minutes between two men who for as many years had worked together in pursuance of the same mad aims.

Afterwards Victor Emmanuel told his faithful Acquarone what was said. The Count-Duke made his notes, and it is on them that this account of the interview is based. Mussolini, too, has described the scene, and the two reports tally sufficiently to confirm their essential truthfulness.

The King remained standing without asking Mussolini to be seated, and began hurriedly.

"My dear Duce, things are not going well. Italy is on the verge of disaster. The army morale is low. The troops do not want to fight. The Generals have lost faith. The Alpine troops have a song in which they say they no longer want to die for Mussolini. I have seen the Order of the Day of the Grand Council, which" (here he cleared his throat) "is a constitutional organ, and the vote is overwhelming. Nineteen members are against you, among them four Knights of the Annunciation. I will see to it that you personally are protected, but you must leave the Government. You will be substituted by Marshal Badoglio, who will form, for the moment, a Ministry of technicians. Then we shall see." He added, as by way of further explanation: "For the nation's welfare the present situation must end. I believe you have no illusions as to the sentiments of the Italian people towards your person."

Was this the first time the truth had dawned on Mussolini? Or was he still confident of his own superhuman power, prepared to brush the King aside in his mind as readily as he had brushed aside his own creation, the Fascist Grand Council?

The Acquarone notes do not answer these questions, but at least they make Mussolini appear to take the situation very seriously in his reply to the King.

"Your Majesty's decision is one of extreme gravity," he is reported to have said. "As things stand today, a crisis means giving the sensation to the Italian people that peace is near, for you propose to expel from the Government the man who declared war. It would be a severe blow to the morale of the armed forces. It would be considered a Churchill-Stalin victory."

Then he added: "I am aware of the hostility of a part of the people. Last night, I recognized this myself in the midst of the Grand Council. Nevertheless, a crisis might be fatal for the country."

Such was the essence of the interview. Neither the King nor Mussolini have left any record of high words, of reproaches, or even argument. They must have been talking very near the surface of things, with grim formality, each conscious of a hidden, deeper conflict being fought out elsewhere. Did it dawn on the great Duce at that moment that in effect he was behaving like any little bourgeois Prime Minister, kissing hands in the Palace after losing his majority?

Acquarone describes the thunderclap that followed. The King accompanied his dismissed Minister to the outside door, and retired. Mussolini's motor-car was no longer waiting below the short flight of steps. His secretary had disappeared. But a military ambulance drew up, and an officer of the Carabinieri stepped out. He saluted.

"I am Colonel Frignani,"¹ he said. "I am here to protect your person. Will you be so kind as to step into this car?"

Dazed, without a word of protest, Mussolini got into the dark ambulance. It was full of guards. He was driven to the Podgora barracks of the Carabinieri in Via Quintino Sella.

There followed an hour's wait alone in a tiny room.

¹ Frignani, afterwards shot in German massacre at the Ardeatine Groves.

I think this must have been the worst hour of Mussolini's life, not excepting those nearly two years later which preceded his ignominious death. It was here in the Podgora barracks that the monstrous bubble of his egoism was pricked.

Then he was moved to another place of detention on the other side of the Tiber. It was the Carabinieri cadet school in Viale Delle Milizie, where he was established in the commander's quarters. An officer stood in the adjoining room, while armed guards were changed every two hours in the corridor. Mussolini's enquiries whether he was under arrest, on what charge and by whose order were left unanswered. Time passed slowly, measured by the rhythmic tread of the sentinels.

At about one in the morning a letter arrived from Marshal Badoglio. Mussolini had lain down on the bed, dressed, but was not asleep. He read:

To His Excellency Cavalier Benito Mussolini.

As Head of the Government I inform Your Excellency that the measures taken are only in your personal interest, inasmuch as I have received news from many sides of the existence of a plot involving your life. I am ready to give the necessary orders to have Your Excellency accompanied with due respect to whatever place Your Excellency shall choose as your residence.

(Signed) Pietro Badoglio, Prime Minister, Marshal of Italy.

When Mussolini had read this letter, General Ferone was shown in. A very few words passed between the two men. The General explained that the new Prime Minister was resolved to continue the war at the side of Germany; he said he thought it would be all right if Mussolini went to Rocca delle Camminate, that famous feudal retreat of his in the Romagna within a stone's throw of the hovel where he was born.

With surprising readiness Mussolini began to dictate his reply to Badoglio's letter.

July 26, one o'clock a.m.

- (a) I am grateful to Marshal Badoglio for the care of my person.
- (b) The only place I consider suitable for my residence is Rocca delle Camminate, where I am ready to proceed at any moment.

- (c) I assure Marshal Badoglio, in remembrance of the work done together in past days, that I will create no difficulties whatsoever for his Government. On the contrary, I will offer all possible collaboration.
- (d) I approve of the decision to continue the war alongside our Ally Germany, and pray that success will accompany the grave responsibility the Marshal Badoglio is about to assume in the name, and by order, of His Majesty the King, whose faithful servant I have been for twenty years and of whom I shall always be a devoted subject. Long live Italy.

This message was written by hand by General Ferone, and signed in full by Mussolini. Whatever else it may reveal to a psychologist, it is proof that a few hours' imprisonment had turned divine Caesar into a very frightened and humble man.

Until the next night no more news reached the bare room of the Carabinieri cadet school. Major Bonitatibus, personally charged with the safety of the prisoner, describes his life as "resigned and tranquil waiting". Mussolini lay on his cot during most of the day, watching every sign of his wardens and "desirous of ingratiating himself with ready obedience to their requests". He ate little, and did not smoke. His attempts at conversation met with brief answers. Not an echo of the events occurring in Rome, now awakening to a forgotten liberty, pierced the walls of his prison.

On Tuesday, July 27th, at seven o'clock in the evening, a platoon of Carabinieri and one of police marched into the yard outside. An officer entered the prisoner's room and said, "Kindly get ready, an order for departure has arrived".

Mussolini went down to the courtyard, still wearing the dark suit and Homburg hat in which he had paid his last visit to his King. A car was waiting with its blinds carefully drawn. Polito, general inspector of the police, the same man who years before had arrested Mussolini's arch enemy, Cesare Rossi, at the Swiss frontier, got in beside him. Preceding the car was another full of Carabinieri and behind it a tank.

The procession followed the Appian Way towards Gaeta.

With the sense of movement, old habits of mind returned to Mussolini, daydreams taking the place of the reality of power. This is how he described his own thoughts in an interview he gave to the Swiss journalist Gentizon in *Le Mois Suisse*,

published in November 1944, and he may well have been speaking the truth.

"I reached Gaeta in the middle of the night. The outline of the fort dominates the harbour. It has played its part in the history of Italy. Pius IX took refuge there in 1848; Mazzini was interned there in 1870. I reflected that the same destiny was awaiting me. I was so convinced of that, that I questioned my Cerberus, Inspector Polito, asking if I was to have the honour to occupy the same cell as the great hero of our Risorgimento . . ."

But this daydream was shattered at once. Inside the city an order was given for the column to continue to the Ciano docks, where Admiral Maugeri, head of Naval Intelligence, was awaiting the prisoner. A speed-boat carried the group to the destroyer *Persefone*, whose steam was already up.

The Admiral has described how Mussolini sank onto a sofa in the ward room, and leant with his elbows on the table. Maugeri offered him some coffee, but Mussolini refused with a shake of his head. Then suddenly he raised himself, looked at the Admiral and cried:

"Why am I treated like this? Since last Sunday I have been completely isolated. They gave me no news of my family, I have no money, and they have left me only with the clothes I am wearing.

"I have a letter from Badoglio, who speaks about a plot against me. They asked where I would like to go. They promised me I could go to Rocca delle Camminate, and they said everything was arranged, even down to the plane which I wanted so that I should not be seen by the people.

"But now you tell me you are taking me to Ponza, where Zaniboni¹ is in prison, who made the attempt against my life and whom I pardoned. Why do they treat me like this?

¹ Zaniboni, Alpine major, former Socialist Member of Parliament, and hero of the 1915-18 war, had in November, 1925, made an attempt on Mussolini's life. At that time Marshal Badoglio sent the following message to Mussolini:

"Excellency, as Chief of the General Staff and collaborator of the National Government, confronted by the fact that the former deputy Zaniboni, at the time of his criminal attack, was wearing the uniform of major of the Alpine regiment, I feel it my duty to protest indignantly, in the name of all those who wear the uniform of soldiers of Italy, against

"I didn't behave like this in 1922. I let Facta go free and made him a Senator; I let Bonomi go free; I did nothing to Orlando.

"I have worked for Italy for twenty-one years—I say for twenty-one years. I have a family. I gave one of my sons to my country. Badoglio worked with me for seventeen years and now he turns on me."

The Admiral, with a prudence learned in ten years in the Intelligence Service, merely answered with friendly murmurs.

Mussolini talked on as the *Persefone* cut through the dark waters. He discussed the blame for Italy's defeat, and laid it on the admirals, the generals (all of them), and, above all, on the Germans.

"The Germans thought they could liquidate Russia in a few months. They were deceived in a way that I would not have believed if Hitler himself had not told me. The Russian plan for mobilization was offered to the German Secret Service. It was a document complete down to its smallest detail. The Germans thought it was too precise to be genuine, but they bought it nevertheless. The Russians shot the agents whom they themselves had sent. When this was learned in Germany Hitler felt sure that the plan was true. It was all faked. Where they mentioned fifty cavalry brigades it should have read fifty armoured brigades and so on.

"After Hitler had got himself into the Russian mess I kept urging him to come to some agreement with Stalin. Quite recently I urged him to do this at any cost, even if it meant renouncing everything he had conquered, even the Ukraine. At Salzburg I told him that. I told him that we would never

the desecrating act of him who, oblivious of the code of honour, covering himself with the insignia of his past conduct, tried to render possible the perpetration of a vile and hateful deed. God protected Your Excellency and Italy. In the heart throb of the nation which in these days vibrates with emotion and exultation, and is gathering affectionately around you, Your Excellency will have already perceived and felt the nearness of all those who bear arms in the country's service. We are obedient and devoted.

"PIETRO BADOGLIO."

Major Zaniboni was condemned to thirty years' imprisonment. When Badoglio became Prime Minister he ordered his liberation, appointing him Chairman of the Purging Committee.

be able to go back to Africa, that the Italian islands would be invaded, that there was one last possibility and that was to make peace with Russia and then bring all the German forces into the Mediterranean. 'You cannot help us,' I said, 'not because you don't want to, but because you cannot unless you make peace with Russia'.

"At Feltre our meeting was not a success. It should have lasted three days, but it lasted only three hours and a half. There I repeated again my plea for peace with Russia—all to no avail."

Maugeri listened and (like a good intelligence officer) jotted down notes unostentatiously. When Mussolini fell silent, he encouraged him to continue, trying to entice him with some leading questions.

"Why, then, did you lead Italy into the war?" he asked.

"I had to," answered Mussolini. "When Hitler declared war I succeeded in gaining ten months with the non-belligerency formula, which saved the alliance, and left every possibility open. But then I had to intervene, otherwise I should have renounced every claim Italy had on France.

"I was sure the Germans would land in England, where I was told there were only two hundred guns in all. Perhaps a landing would not have driven the British to surrender, as they might have removed their Government to Canada or Australia, but we would in any case have had an impregnable position.

"At the time I even urged Hitler to seize Gibraltar. But he replied that he was not sure of Franco's position. I thought we should simply have told Franco that we were going to cross his territory with or without his permission. It would have been sufficient to make a line at La Linea, and then the British Fleet would have been compelled to leave.

"We must disentangle ourselves from the Germans. We have the right and duty to tell them that we have fought their war for three years, that we have lost all our merchant marine, almost all our fleet, and many of our towns.

"They cannot help us, so there is nothing else to do. The Hungarians and Rumanians will follow our lead, as neither of them can stand it any longer. And it will be finished. . . ."

The dictator's head dropped. The Admiral leant over and observed that Mussolini had fallen asleep.

At about one o'clock on the following day the ship dropped anchor near the island of Ponza. Here Mussolini was to stay for ten days in a fisherman's hut under the surveillance of a unit of Carabinieri at the orders of Sergeant-Major Antichi. On the island with him during this detention were men condemned by Fascist tribunals for political reasons and a group of prisoners who had come from the Balkans. Mussolini, however, had no contact with these men. In total isolation, he passed his days reading two books: *The Barbaric Odes* of Carducci and *The Life of Jesus Christ* by Giuseppe Ricciotti. And still his dreams of grandeur, his mania for historical repetitions, did not abandon him. He wrote in his diary:

"Ponza cannot be compared with Capri nor even Ischia, but it has a certain rustic beauty and important historical monuments. Agrippina, the mother of Nero, was proscribed here, as were Julia, Augustus's daughter, the saint Flavia Domitilla, the pope Saint Sylvester the Martyr, and, many centuries after, the Grand Master of the Masons, Torrigiani, General Bencivenga, the engineer Bordiga, and, last of the series, Ras Imiru. . . ."

All this while the Germans, although they had officially recognized the change in government, were intensifying a real military occupation of Italy, and were preparing to set up a substitute régime should the King submit himself to the Allies. For their purposes Mussolini was still a necessity. Dictatorship, even dependent and discredited dictatorship, has much the same need for continuity as has monarchy. It is as perilous to change dictators as to change kings. Divinity, however attenuated, still hedged Mussolini about. Exchanging substance for shadow, therefore, he was now the best choice as a puppet.

In any case he had few rivals. His erstwhile colleagues were all in hiding, or had been seized by Badoglio, or were known to be hostile to the Germans. The only outstanding Fascist leader who had succeeded in escaping to Germany the day after the *coup d'état* was Farinacci, who was too notoriously in German pay to make a good Quisling. It therefore became

a major object of German strategy to seize Mussolini's person.

The Badoglio Government was well aware of this. Their intelligence service was vigilant.

Thus it was that in the night of August 7th the prisoner was awakened, ordered to dress, and put immediately aboard the ship *La Pantera*. On deck there was Admiral Maugeri again, smiling, with his little notebook. The ship set sail in the direction of Sardinia.

"Why are you taking me away from here, Admiral?" were Mussolini's first words.

"For safety, Excellency, for safety."

A flash of gratified vanity lightened the dull eyes of Mussolini: "I see. The British. They would like nothing better than to tie me on a rock as they did Napoleon. In fact, I have noticed strange movements recently around the Island."

"No, Excellency, not the British. The Germans. We had reason to believe that the Germans were preparing to kidnap you."

Mussolini drew himself up and remonstrated:

"That is one of the greatest humiliations that could be inflicted on me. How could anyone imagine that I would go to Germany and try to resume government backed by Germans?"

The ex-Duce lapsed into a sulky silence, and Maugeri, who was longing to collect another little budget of notes to take back to Rome, saw he had made a tactless beginning. Striking out, therefore, on another line, he spoke of the war news in general and the progress of the Allied invasion. He had to admit that the greater part of Sicily was in Allied hands, and that Palermo had received Allied troops with joy. Only small units of the Hermann Goering Division were still left in the neighbourhood of Catania.

Mussolini answered in dreamy, distant fashion. "There is nothing else to do but to continue the war. The British are making a great mistake in not granting us acceptable peace terms immediately."

The assiduous note-taker here observes the contradiction with his prisoner's previously expressed defeatism. Mussolini

must have plucked a little courage after all from the shades of Nero's mother and Pope Sylvester. But the mood did not last, and he became maudlin:

"Perhaps it would have been better if my disease had got worse in 1937 and I had died then. The people of Italy would then have remembered me with gratitude."

He asked what had become of the members of the "Grand Council of traitors". Maugeri told him some were hidden, others had fled abroad, all more or less had disappeared. A spasm of hatred "gave His Excellency the expression of a wild animal shut in a cage".

"Grandi's behaviour at the last Grand Council meeting," Mussolini said, "was perfidious and cunning. Ciano was really an infamous figure. I put up with him at the Foreign Ministry for seven years, I don't know how. He was light-headed and superficial, and his private life was not commendable. Scorza also behaved ambiguously. The only one who showed a well balanced mind was Federzoni."

After this, conversation languished and died away. Maugeri's attempts at reopening it met with no success.

At two in the afternoon *La Pantera* anchored before the island of Maddalena. Slowly and heavily Mussolini started for the gangway. The crew stood to attention. Mussolini took leave of Admiral Maugeri with a flash of humour: "Goodbye, Admiral. When we take our third trip together we will resume our conversations."

There was never to be a third conversation.

On Maddalena Mussolini was lodged in a small house which had been built before the war by an Englishman named Webber. It had a dreary outlook onto arid rocks. During his stay Mussolini was allowed to walk in the woods behind the house, escorted by Carabinieri. For military reasons the island had been evacuated some time before by all civilians.

Thus the prison seemed safe, particularly as Mussolini's fate was unknown in the outer world, and many even believed him dead. Uneventful tranquillity now marked the life of the ex-Duce, who had started calmly to write his last book.

Two persons were not so much at ease. One was General Antonio Basso, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces in

Sardinia, who was passing sleepless nights worrying about the responsibility of harbouring in his zone of command such an illustrious and dangerous prisoner. The other was Captain Skorzeny, SS Chief whom Hitler had personally charged with the finding and rescue of Mussolini. In an aeroplane piloted by Lieutenant Gerlach, Skorzeny flew over the entire archipelago of Maddalena in search of a clue that would lead him to the hiding place of Mussolini, of whose presence in the neighbourhood he had received vague reports from his informers.

General Basso intensified the watch on Mr. Webber's little house, circling it with machine guns. At last, after a night of insomnia, he grasped the bull by the horns and wrote to the Minister of War, General Sorice, the following letter:

"I refer to the presence on Maddalena of a personage of high rank who is residing in a house overlooking the bay.

"I have the duty to state that in these waters there are numerous warships of our ally [Germany] and very few of our own, used for mercantile traffic with Corsica and for the defence of the allied [German] base of Palau.

"This situation may be the origin of trouble.

"I thus deem it expedient that the personage in question be transferred elsewhere, or, if it is essential that he remain in Sardinia, that he be at least sent to a village in the mountains more in the interior, where vigilance may be more effective and rigorous."

The General was right to be suspicious. Had he known, all was already prepared for the rescue of Mussolini, whose whereabouts had been deduced from the telltale extra precautions taken. To avoid friction in the already strained Italo-German relations, Skorzeny's men were to be camouflaged as British commandos. They were to be let ashore from a U-boat sent from Palau, and to fake an Allied landing, overcoming the guards and liberating the prisoner. Mussolini was to be taken to Germany, and kept hidden, to make the Italians believe he was in British hands, until his reappearance on the scene might serve for the creating of discord in Italy or for forming a new Quisling government. This plan, as came out later through Skorzeny's statements, was to have been put into action on the 29th of August.

The plan was defeated by a typically foolish German gesture, which served to confirm those responsible for Mussolini's person that a safer prison was required. On his birthday Mussolini received a package. It contained a complete edition of Nietzsche's works with the following letter:

"Duce,

"In accordance with Hitler's orders and with the permission of Marshal Badoglio, I am sending you a gift for your birthday. The Führer will be happy if this great German literary work succeeds in giving you a little pleasure and if you will consider it as an expression of his personal affection for you.

"I add my own special greetings.

(Signed) "Field-Marshal Kesselring."

This package arrived, it is known, with the blessing of Badoglio. No one knows, however, what ironical intention Hitler had in sending it, or whether he was simply behaving in his humourless, Nazi way and trying to do the best he could for his lost colleague. Above all, no one knows the spirit in which the present was accepted, and whether Mussolini, pulling out the volume named "*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*", settled down amiably in his humiliating captivity to distinguish between "the morality of masters and the immorality of slaves". It is always possible, of course, that some interesting missive, dealing with future rescue plans, slipped out from among the pages.

What is certain is that the episode led to another sudden migration for the captive—and out of Skorzeny's immediate reach. On the morning of August 28th Captain Faiola, of the Carabinieri who commanded the escort, woke Mussolini and told him to be ready to leave. A Red Cross plane touched the water in front of the house. An hour and a half later with Mussolini inside it had returned to the waters of Lake Bracciano. An ambulance was waiting. At high speed it carried Mussolini, this time in the company of Police Inspector Gueli, to the foot of the lovely Gran Sasso mountain. Here Mussolini was lodged in a house called "Villetta" which during the winter was used by skiers. A few days later the last part of the journey was achieved and the prisoner was carried by funicular railway to the Gran Sasso hotel, 9,000 feet up.

It was the highest prison in the world, for the most ambitious of the world's prisoners. Hitler himself would have envied it. Its one connexion with the outside world was the fragile cable of the railway. It was safe, surely, and magnificently appropriate.

But the story does not end here, in the clouds, as Goethe or D'Annunzio would have had it do. This is but the middle of the play; we are approaching only the interval. An interim *deus ex machina* is necessary to carry us over into the second act.

And the teller of this episode, which would not have disgraced the early silent cinema or a serial tale from the *Boys' Own Paper*, is Captain Skorzeny himself, king of kidnappers, hitherto foiled, as we know, in the biggest assignment of his rascally career.

If Mussolini once thought himself Divine, or a very intimate collaborator with Providence, he can be forgiven for returning somewhat to the notion after he had been rescued from the top of the Gran Sasso.

On the morning of September 12th the peak was veiled in fleecy clouds. Through them aeroplanes were zigzagging at a height that prevented any recognition of their nationality.

This abnormal occurrence had alarmed Inspector Gueli, who tried in vain to identify the planes. He was at a loss what to do. Following some confused news of a concluded armistice, no new orders had come from Rome. He telephoned to the prefecture of Aquila, but the answer was that no new orders had arrived there, and that as for the prisoner there was nothing to do but to stick to the standing orders already received. These were to stop any attempt of escape at all costs, using force if necessary.

"Keep a unit of men below at the funicular railway station," the Prefect advised. "In case of necessity they must not hesitate to cut the suspending cable of the car, which will stop any communication between the hotel and the rest of the world. If he attempts to escape do not hesitate to kill the prisoner."

There was nothing for Gueli to do but to wait.

As the prisoner was getting a breath of air before an open window after luncheon and the Carabinieri on duty were smoking and chatting among themselves in the yard in front

of the hotel, a plane dived from the midst of the clouds and landed perilously in a field about a hundred yards away. To the astonishment of the Carabinieri some men jumped out of it and dashed to a hiding spot among the rocks. Simultaneously, as if by magic, other men appeared in other points of the vicinity, and got into positions whence they dominated the hotel.

A general state of alarm was called and Mussolini was withdrawn from the window. The Carabinieri called for their captain, Faiola, who leapt up from his afternoon nap and dashed to the courtyard.

He found his men overpowered by German parachute troops and lined up against the wall with a machine gun pointed at them. That blond giant, Captain Skorzeny, covered him, shouting "Hands up!" in Italian.

There was nothing else to be done. The skirmish had been won by the parachutists without firing a shot. Mussolini was free. Captain Skorzeny had accomplished his mission in Rocambolesque fashion.

He told a German journalist of this extraordinary adventure some days later. It had been possible only because of the state of chaos caused by Badoglio's flight from Rome and his consequent abandonment of central power.

"As Gran Sasso mountain is 9,000 feet high," said Skorzeny, with the complacency of success, "access to it is difficult. The funicular railway service had been interrupted. There were approximately a hundred Carabinieri and police camping around the little winter resort.

"To get an idea of the possibilities of my *coup de main* I myself flew over the place at a great height many times and photographed the entire zone. On these photographs, which showed the difficulties of a landing but revealed the existence of a small but adequate field in the immediate vicinity of the hotel I planned all the details of the expedition.

"Each of my men had his special assignment. The road we were to cover and the spots where we were to assemble were all clearly indicated by the photographs, enlarged.

"Eighteen men took part in the direct action, landing in Storch planes round the hotel. They were supported by a

certain number of parachutists who had landed the night before at a larger radius. The planes that landed dived from an altitude of over 13,500 feet. Each man as he stepped out of his plane went into action according to plan. I myself went to the rear of the hotel with two men and destroyed the radio station there with the butt of my gun. Then I returned to the front where my men had already overwhelmed the Carabinieri.

"I saw the Duce approaching the window. 'Go back!' I called out to him, and he retired immediately. When all danger was over and the garrison had surrendered I went up to his room and said: 'Duce, the Fuhrer has sent me to save you. You are under my protection. I hope that all will be well.' The Duce, in tears, embraced me, saying: 'I had never doubted that the Führer would save me.'

"The action was completed without a shot, but three men were killed and several injured during the difficult landings.

"After the excitement had died down the Carabinieri commander offered me a glass of wine and toasted 'the winner'."

Thus Skorzeny, the adventurer. Mussolini, too, gives his version of the rescue, which corresponds with the captain's admirable account, although it is adorned with romantic details. In one version, however, he makes a confession of some interest. It is in the interview published in *Le Mois Suisse*, where in two places he admits he was afraid.

"I could see before me," he said, "the alarm of the flabbergasted Carabinieri and police. The moment was decisive. Fighting might start at any time. In this case, my life would have been in danger, and so I called out: 'Don't move. Don't shoot. It's all over.' The Carabinieri heeded me, the parachutists arrived, and in two minutes the action was over."

After an effusive account of his meeting with his liberator, Mussolini concludes his tale by describing the difficult taking off of the Storch plane he had been put into. "The plane started off over blocks of stone and ditches right before an abyss. Then, in the nick of time, she rose. That moment had been one of terror for me. But now I was safe."

His safety was to cost his country a civil war, foreign oppression, and final collapse.

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made under cover of some seedy officials sent by train to Lisbon to arrange an exchange of minor diplomats from Chile.

It is an odd little bit of history, this, and should not go unrecorded. I happened to visit Lisbon later, and had the curiosity to investigate the circumstances. The story, so far as I am aware, has been told in detail only once—in some articles in a newspaper from the Portuguese provincial town of Oporto. In the rush of world events the final end of Mussolini's dream of conquest was forgotten, except in that remote and neutral corner of Europe where the strangely artificial beverage called port wine is made.

The Fascist War ended with a subterfuge. There was no other way. Hitler had acted very quickly after the historic meeting of the Grand Council. Whatever semblance of independence he had conceded to his brother dictator he denied to Badoglio, who after all was frankly, though feebly, trying to destroy the elements of Fascism in Italy. By the beginning of August 1943 that part of the country not occupied by the Allies was in many senses occupied by the Germans. Where the German influence could not make itself felt, there was only a kind of wellmeaning chaos.

Nominally, the Nineteen who voted power back to the King at the Grand Council did not constitute a peace party; one of them, indeed, had spoken out strongly in favour of continuing the war. Nominally, Badoglio had formed his government under the slogan "The war goes on". But unspoken in everyone's mind was the conviction that Mussolini had been overthrown in order to rescue Italy from her fatal alliance with Germany. Fundamentally this was true, and the Nazis knew it as well as anyone. Badoglio, if he were really a peace-maker, would certainly have to hide his light under a bushel.

On August 12 a train left the station of Rome-Termini with a large number of officials on board. It was bound for the French frontier and the officials were from the Foreign Ministry. Armed with diplomatic passports, they had to make the difficult journey to Lisbon, where they were to meet the returning staff of the Italian Legation in Chile, a country which had recently broken off relations with the Axis.

It was difficult to see why such a large party should be necessary to supervise these technical arrangements. Was there not an Italian Minister in Lisbon? Still more puzzling was the inclusion in the party of a certain Commander Raimondi, from the Ministry of Exchange, whose precise functions when he reached Lisbon it would have been difficult to define.

Commander Raimondi's dark glasses hid the not very clever eyes of Badoglio's friend General Castellano, who had been chosen for the delicate mission of offering peace to the Allies.

General Castellano was a strange choice for such a delicate, such a momentous mission. It was he who was to bring the Fascist War to an end, to write "paid" finally to the last glories of the Mussolini era. And, under the very noses of the Germans, he was to undo the portentous "Pact of Steel".

What was his equipment for this vital rôle? He was a trusted friend of Badoglio's, and he had never been a Fascist by conviction, but only out of convenience. He was shrewd, and had a convincing way with him. But he was not clever. He spoke bad French, acquired while doing some blundering espionage for Roatta in Marseilles. He spoke no English at all.

One can imagine him sitting a little worried in his reserved compartment in the blacked-out train, wondering how to set about the task which Badoglio, in a sudden spurt of resolve, had hurriedly thrust upon him. Indeed, but for a happy acquaintance picked up in the train, he might have failed entirely in his mission.

The acquaintance was a tall, fair young man attached to the mission, who introduced himself as the Consul Franco Montanari. Over a beer, he explained that he was half American, his mother being a Boston woman. He had lived much of his life in America and had studied at Harvard. His object in getting himself attached to this mission, he confessed, was to try to get in Lisbon news from his relatives in the States.

To Castellano this was a heaven-sent meeting. Here was a man who, besides speaking perfect American, clearly understood Anglo-Saxon habits and seemed gifted with the tact and social adroitness that Castellano lacked. With Montanari's help it would not be such a hit and miss affair after all.

From that night forward Montanari became the faithful shadow of Badoglio's emissary. He followed him everywhere, smoothing out all the little difficulties, and the big ones, along the path which led through Lisbon back to Cassibile, in Sicily, where the final instrument of surrender was signed on the 3rd September, 1943.

The "sealed train"—as fateful as that which took Lenin to Russia—stopped for half a day in Madrid, where Montanari embarked on his first piece of state business. He managed to find his way, without arousing suspicion, to the British Embassy in that unfriendly capital where Sir Samuel Hoare received him. By one of the ironies of history the man whose name, with that of Laval, had been associated with the most notable attempt to appease Italy was the first to learn of her intention to surrender. Whether Sir Samuel was thoroughly convinced of Montanari's credentials is not known. But at least he must have hoped they were good, and he sent a code message on to his colleague in Lisbon.

Castellano had taken a risk in sending his adviser to the British Embassy in Madrid; but he needed encouragement. When he got to Lisbon he was feeling much surer about his mission. Boldly he wrote the name "Raimondi" in the register of the Hotel Borges, and prepared to set out that very evening to see the British Ambassador Sir Ronald Hugh Campbell. It was August 17th, the day that the final occupation of Sicily was announced.

But the interview, in the Ambassador's private residence, was not a success. Castellano's credentials needed support, and what could be simpler, it was asked, than for the Rome Government to lay the necessary information in the British Legation at the Vatican?

The two men went back to their hotel and sent a carefully worded telegram to Rome. There was nothing to do but to wait.

Or, rather, the poor "Raimondi" had plenty to do. He had to lend some colour to his official mission as representative of the Italian Ministry of Exchange. He had to approach the Italian Legation, where, to his horror, he found on the staff a real expert in questions of exchanges, prices, and clearing

systems. This Doctor Ossola was delighted to find a colleague from his own country, and immediately plunged into what to him was the most delightful technical conversation. The nervous "Yes, yes," and "indeed", which constituted the whole economic terminology of Castellano, was hardly sufficient to carry the thing through. It was not long before he remarked to Montanari "Either this Raimondi is an idiot, or he is not a functionary of my Ministry". Montanari saved the situation by wittily replying "No doubt he is both; it's quite normal in a Ministry set up by the Fascists". But the situation was becoming dangerous.

Italian missions in wartime, even when they are merely meeting a boat from Chile, hardly pass without notice. One day Castellano saw his assumed name on the chief news page of the *London Times*. Reuter's correspondent in Lisbon had copied out these Italian names from the hotel register, and the *London Press* printed them for what they were worth. The *Evening Standard* correspondent went further and built up a story about them, imagining them all to form a peace mission whose object was to contact the Allies through the good offices of the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon.

And the Germans. What did they make of it all? More particularly what did their large espionage service in Portugal make of it?

Detective story writers have long since discovered the principle that the safest place in which to commit a crime is the immediate neighbourhood of someone already notorious for the same kind of activity. The more closely the police are watching a man suspected of homicidal tendencies, the easier is it for someone else to commit a murder in the next room. So where could an Italian seek peace more unsuspectingly than within a mile or two of Count Dino Grandi, the arch peace-maker, the man who had brought Fascism tumbling to the ground in hopes of getting his country out of the war?

Grandi was living in extremely modest circumstances in a small white villa at Estoril, the smart seaside suburb of Lisbon. From that day in early August when Reuter's correspondent reported his arrival (under the name of Domenico Galli, and with his famous beard shaved off) he had, from all sides,

been a marked man. None could believe that this Samson, who had torn down the pillars of the Temple and yet escaped, was still "eyeless in Gaza, at the mill, with slaves". He alone of the Grand Council conspirators had escaped easily to the outside world, armed with a false passport granted him by the new government. He alone, by reason of his long period at the Court of St. James's, was likely to have friends in England through whom to make the first contacts. Baron von Reinsbaden, representative of the German Red Cross in Lisbon, and also chief German spy, set his men to watch Dino Grandi as a cat watches a mouse.

They watched so hard that they knew nothing about a code message that reached the British Embassy in Lisbon from His Britannic Majesty's Legation at the Holy See. They did not remark, after dark on August 19th, Castellano and Montanari pay a second visit to Sir Ronald Campbell's house.

Residents on the opposite side of the street, however, noticed four people engaged in earnest conversation in His Excellency's study. The curtains were not even drawn, and the lighted interior showed up clearly. Diplomats do sometimes work late after all, the neighbours remarked, and thought no more about it.

The four men were Castellano, the inevitable Montanari, the British general Kenneth Strong and the American general Walter B. Smith. The Ambassador himself was not visible. With the American *Chargé d'Affaires*, George F. Kennan, he was listening to the conversation, unobserved, from the next room.

What was said is still not precisely known. But it all boils down to the question, how can one discuss the conditions of Unconditional Surrender? The answer is that the victor discusses conditions only after the surrender is made. It was useless for Castellano to talk about military collaboration, co-belligerence, or the immediate limitation of bombing. The two Allied generals declared they were interested only in the technical arrangements for signing the armistice.

It is "yes or no", and Castellano does not appear to be a plenipotentiary. So he must go back to Rome, and urge his masters to invoke the aid of radio if they are to save other

Italian cities from the bombs and shells of the Allies. He is given a little transmitting set tuned to a certain receiver in Algiers. Next day someone goes shopping in search of a code. At Bertrand's book store they find three copies of a romantic novel by the minor Italian writer Bino Samminiatielli. It will serve.

Castellano's duty now is to get back to Rome as quickly as possible. The Italians from Chile are waiting in their hotel for the signal to depart. It is hardly possible to extend the formalities of their exchange much longer. They indeed have no great desire to go. They were perfectly happy in Chile, where they had their own comfortable jobs and houses in a land with whose people they saw no need to quarrel. It seems strange that they should be returning to their beloved country only at the moment when she is doomed.

However, there was no help for it, and they had braced themselves to face the journey and its unimagined sequel. Most of them came originally from Milan, and Milan by this time was being badly knocked about. None of them knew what they would find there.

But Castellano, who had the best of reasons to hasten back to Rome, hesitated. What was worrying him was whether the train would be bombed as it passed along the Riviera and into Italy and his mission brought to nothing. An order had been transmitted to the Allied Air Commands concerning the diplomatic privilege to be accorded this train. But the General was not satisfied. He insisted on waiting three days, until confirmation of reception of the order had come from the various Commands. Three days lost for peace.

At length, on August 23rd, the train left. General Castellano was on board, and the Italian Minister from Chile, though not knowing why, had the love romance locked in his despatch case. Startled-looking diplomats and businessmen, with their weeping wives and children, filled the rest of the train. "Journey into Hell" one journalist described it, having seen the train slide away into the tunnel from the gloomy Rossio station.

Unbombed, but having passed through desolation, the train reached Rome on August 27th. It might have been too late.

Badoglio had panicked. Anything, he felt, might have happened to Castellano. He could have been killed or captured, or, more likely, he could have betrayed them. So the Marshal had now thrown discretion to the winds and had sent by air yet another emissary to Lisbon, General Zanussi. To gain Allied confidence he had taken the desperate step of sending with him a British general drawn from an Italian prisoner of war camp. This was the very distinctive-looking General Carton de Wiart, who, with his great height, his injured arm, his one eye and his monocle, was, one would have thought, the very worst choice for conducting secret negotiations.

But here the detective-story principle of boldness in crime was again vindicated. The negotiations remained secret. General de Wiart, to some English friends who hailed him in the street, pretended he had come from a camp already liberated by the Allies. The British were able to send Zanussi to Algiers and Wiart to London.

In Algiers from August 25th onwards, four operators took it in turns to listen night and day on the wave length of General Castellano's little portable set. On August 27th a feeble signal was received.

It was the beginning of the end. It was the Italian acceptance of unconditional surrender. The first of Hitler's satellites had asked for mercy.

Long technical conversations followed—all in words taken from the love-story in the Minister's bag—concerning arrangements for the signing of the necessary instrument. On August 31st Castellano, still escorted by Montanari, met the Allied plenipotentiaries at Cassibile near Syracuse. By September 2nd the details were complete. On September 3rd a sober and secret ceremony was performed in a tent in the sunny encampment. The Italian surrender was signed by the four people observed a fortnight before sitting in the British Ambassador's lighted study in distant Lisbon.

General Eisenhower, a silent witness of the ceremony, pulled off, as he left the tent, a tiny branch from the olive tree which shaded it.

No doubt at the same moment, from Lisbon, Baron von Reinsbaden, Red Cross official and German spy, was cabling

to his masters in Berlin "Grandi being strictly watched. All his contacts are controlled. Nothing to fear".

Also, at the same moment, from Rome, the new German Ambassador, Von Rahn, was cabling home the following despatch:

"I have just seen Prime Minister Badoglio. He told me he considered it opportune to notify me, following the Anglo-American landings in Calabria, that the German Government could continue to count on the backing of the Italian army and people, in spite of the doubts that may have arisen. 'A desire for peace is evident in the country,' Badoglio told me, 'particularly among the women, but we shall fight alongside our ally Germany until the end'."

Four days later a group of Allied prisoners are escorted to the headquarters of the Italian General Staff in the Palazzo Caprara in Rome. Behind the padded doors, where General Carboni receives them, they cease pretending. They are a party sent by General Eisenhower, and led by the American General Taylor, to conclude with the Italian General Staff the arrangements for publishing and implementing the terms of the surrender. They have landed some hours before at the port of Gaeta.

The talks, so far as they have been revealed, show how much more the Italians feared their German allies than any amount of bombing by the British and Americans. General Taylor had been instructed to get the whole operation under way by the following day, but Badoglio and Ambrosio hurried to the meeting to ask for a week's delay. Certain Italian troop movements were, they thought, necessary, so as to neutralize as far as possible the German forces in Italy.

But the Anglo-Americans proved impatient. They pointed out that a division of American parachute troops had orders to land near Rome the following day.

Badoglio was alarmed. He declared he was not in a position to back the parachute troops. His forces were too spread out *vis-à-vis* the Germans.

Taylor finally agreed to send a telegram to stop the parachute troops, but publication of the armistice terms, he insisted, must be made on the following day. And so he

prepared to return to Africa, leaving the immediate future somewhat uncertain, but making it clear that Badoglio must act with the utmost despatch.

What actually happened in Rome between the next day (September 8th) and the German occupation on September 12th is contradictory, chaotic and incomprehensible. It is best to record the known events chronologically.

At noon on September 8th the King received for the first time Minister Von Rahn. He made no mention of the imminent armistice. On the contrary, he assured the Minister of the will of the Italian people to continue the struggle. Von Rahn telegraphed Berlin to this effect as soon as he left the palace.

At 4 p.m. Taylor returned to his headquarters by plane, without knowing if the armistice would or would not be made public.

At 5.30 p.m. the King held a Council of the Crown, at which were present Badoglio, Acquarone, Generals Ambrosio, Sorice and Sandalli, Admiral de Courten and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Guariglia. While they were conferring an ultimatum arrived from Eisenhower demanding the publication of the armistice at eight o'clock that night. Otherwise, Eisenhower said, the Allies would publish the terms.

At 7 p.m. His Majesty assumed the responsibility of ordering the publication of the news.

At 8 p.m. the Italian radio broadcast a message from Badoglio announcing the armistice, and declaring that the Italian armed forces would resist any opposition to the carrying out of its clauses.

Early the following day, September 9th, the King, the Queen, Prince Humbert, Badoglio and some other members of the Government fled to Ortona, where they boarded an Italian warship for Brindisi.

Rome relapsed into chaos. Those Ministers who had not been able to run away with the others lost track of one another and hid where best they could. For some hours a semblance of order and command was assumed by the aged Marshal Caviglia. Later, it was General Calvi di Bergolo, the King's son-in-law, who issued a proclamation assuming the command

of the "open city" of Rome. Meanwhile Kesselring's Germans were rapidly advancing towards the city, disarming, as they marched, any isolated Italian troops they met.

On September 10th, in the afternoon, a few chosen Italian troops fell in fragmentary and isolated action at the gates of Rome in a gallant and a vain attempt to close the way to the Germans. Half hoping that "the British were coming", the Roman people gathered helplessly in Piazza Colonna. Representatives of various Italian anti-Fascist parties addressed them from the balcony of the Palazzo Wedekind and from improvised stands. In that hour of anguish, when the German mechanized troops were already on the Ostiense road, there was born the Committee of National Liberation, which for eighteen months were to hamper the occupying troops at every turn.

On the morning of September 11th the last bullet in Rome's defence was shot off by a handful of disorganized soldiers and groups of citizens armed with shot-guns hastily distributed the night before. The action had cost 325 Italian dead. The German General Stahl assumed command of the city, and there began the long Calvary of Rome.

So ended the "Fascist War", which three years before had begun with the watchword "Conquer" "flying through the air and kindling hearts from the Alps to the Indian Ocean".

CHAPTER V

SIX GENTLEMEN OF VERONA

IT IS THE Nineteen again, the Nineteen who voted against Mussolini at that fateful Grand Council meeting which began this bloody tragedy six months before. They are to be tried for treason—that is to say, for having, after years of passive acquiescence, cast a genuine vote in the deliberative assembly to which they belonged.

Here in Verona, where a fine drizzle is turning thick snow to slush, Grandi the ringleader is not to be found. He has long been safe in Portugal, a sunnier clime. Twelve others are also absent—some in Switzerland, some with the Allies, others successfully hiding elsewhere in Italy. But Six remain—Six to pay the price of all, Six startled men who once, hardly knowing what they were doing, joined in pushing a keystone away, and now find the arch tumbling about their ears. They are Ciano, De Bono, Cianetti, Marinelli, Pareschi and Gottardi.

One other member of the Fascist Grand Council hovers in spirit over Verona these dark, January days. He is Benito Mussolini, the author and producer, manager and impresario of this tragic farce. But he shuns the footlights; is not even in the house. In a lonely villa at Saló, on Lake Garda, he follows the drama hour by hour, up to the last inevitable curtain.

A dreadful change has come upon Mussolini since his captivity. The wheel has turned full circle, and he is back again in his anarchist days, when Angelica Balabanoff was his first mistress, and he was captivated by the utopian but bloody dreams of Carlo Cafiero. With his former enemy Bombacci he discusses mad social experiments, which now, as a Republican Fascist, he believes he is able to carry out. Real life dissolves into a mist, shot through, however, by the wildest hatred.

Mussolini has come down from the Gran Sasso filled with hatred. Hatred for all—for the Italian people who had accepted

his downfall, for his friends of yesterday, for the Monarchy, for the bourgeoisie, for the Vatican. He appears to have made Cecco degli Angiolieri's invective his own: "*S'io fossi foco arderei lo mondo, s'io fossi acqua lo allagherei. . . .*"

His henchmen are the Republican police, recruited from the gaols, and the Black Brigades, invented by Renato Ricci, the torturer of Carrara. The execution of "vengeance" is put in their hands. They are the men who, with Himmler's Gestapo lent by Hitler, will bathe "non-occupied" Italy in blood.

In a secret part of the "Iron Pact" there was a clause which bound both Italy and Germany to intervene with armed force in each other's country in case of internal upheaval against either Fascism or Nazism. The Germans, on their side, had been preparing for some time to put this clause into effect. Their plan of military occupation had been perfected as soon as the German General Staff first sensed a possible Italian defection. For some time German functionaries had invaded Italian administrative branches, as experts and observers. Hotels were overcrowded with blond tourists, industries and factories with special technicians.

At a given time, all these men had but to strip off their civilian clothes, get into the dark uniforms of SS troops, and assume the effective command of the organizations they had been assigned to, just as Kesselring's troops occupied all the strategic points of the peninsula.

The web of the German political organization spread itself out over the military framework of the Wehrmacht in a very few days. Meanwhile, it was deemed useful to constitute a strictly controlled Italian administration, to allow a more rapid and efficient German penetration.

And so that grotesque figment, the Italian Social Republic, came into being. Republic without a president, without a cabinet, without a parliament. All one can say about it is that its definition "republic" satisfied the vindictive anti-monarchic instincts of him who two months before had subscribed himself "the faithful servant of Your Majesty".

The Germans, however, used their battery of evil to little avail in their attempt to re-create in Northern Italy a

simulacrum of a Fascist state. Marshal Graziani, undermined morally and physically since the attempt on his life in Addis Ababa in 1937, blinded by his long lasting antagonism towards Badoglio, found the prestige of his name hardly adequate for an attempt at constructing a republican army, the failure of which was demonstrated in November, 1944, when the German Command issued orders to dissolve its formations entirely. Official statistics show that this army then numbered no more than 100,000 men; according to the Fascist paper *La Sera* of Milan there had been 1,500,000 deserters. Pavolini, Party Secretary, sought in vain to build a Republic Fascist organization by alternating corruption with threats. The socialization of factories became the chief part in his programme. Mezzasoma achieved his lifelong dream of becoming Minister of Information, and lent the service of German propaganda his undoubtedly excellent cultural gifts.

But to all these efforts the Italian people responded either with a total passive resistance, or with the gallant struggle of partisans and saboteurs.

And to this drama, as he might have watched it from his lakeside villa, Mussolini was indifferent. As we have seen, the thought of vengeance was his only contact with the real world. Six of the Grand Council "traitors" had at last been rounded up. He could wait no longer. The trial must begin.

Though he was twenty miles away, this trial was very much part of the life of Mussolini, an essential element in his decline and fall. It is the way he had chosen to reveal to the world the degradation of his own spirit. In truth it was he who was stepping behind the prisoner's bar, facing the civilized world, and defiantly pleading guilty.

Suffering had not mellowed this man, nor purged any of the dross. We begin to suspect the terrible truth as we read the story of his captivity, told by himself and others. It was at any rate a statesman who met the challenge of the Fascist Grand Council. It was a madman, divorced from reality, thirsty for revenge, who broke loose from his mountain prison in the Gran Sasso Hotel.

He remained a dictator—but a dictator in a nightmare. His solid achievements had vanished, and belonged to a past

which he dared not recall to mind. He was like a rich man who, having fallen on evil times, had become an actor, and was reduced to personating his former real self against canvas scenery representing his own lost mansions.

That way madness lies. Absolute evil seems to triumph in Mussolini's soul. Mere indifference to human suffering gives way to love of cruelty for its own sake. Bloody revenge becomes the first object of his life.

And the dramatist in him insists that this horrible descent to the pit should be clearly and neatly underlined, for all the world to see, within the four walls of a courtroom.

Little does it matter to Mussolini that one among the accused is the father of his grandchildren, and that his own daughter has implored him on her knees, as wife and mother, for the life of her husband. Little does it matter that another among them is one of the comrades of his first political attempts, his poverty and struggles, Marinelli; or that a third is old Marshal De Bono who had been one of the very first, far back in 1920, to lend a touch of respectability, with his age and rank, to the insurrection of boys and agitators which at that time Fascism was; or that a fourth, Pareschi, is one who had never taken part in a Grand Council before, had never busied himself with politics, and was merely an agricultural technician. Little does it matter that all acted by a supreme impulse to save their country. They had dared rebel against their Duce and they must die.

Even Ciano, the Duce's son-in-law, knew that a sentence of death was inevitable. Before the trial started, on the day before Christmas Eve, he penned a letter to the King which he thrust into the hands of his wife on one of her subsequent visits.

"Your Majesty," he wrote, "permit me, who have arrived at the last hour of my life, to send a devout thought to Your Majesty. If last August I disappeared from Rome it was because the Gerinans had given me to understand that the lives of my children were in danger. Under the pretext of taking me to Spain they arrested me and held me prisoner in Bavaria. Today, three months later, I am in the prison at Verona where, subjected always to the martyrdom of surveillance by the SS, I await a trial which is nothing else but premeditated murder.

"Your Majesty has for long shared my ideas and my faith. I can therefore testify before God and man to the heroic fight sustained by Your Majesty to prevent the error and crime which this war at the side of the Germans has been. Neither on the Monarchy, nor on the people, nor even on the Government does the guilt fall of the sorrow which today torments the country. One man, one man alone, Mussolini, out of obscure personal ambitions, out of 'thirst for military glory' (to use his own words), has deliberately led the country to the abyss.

"I have arranged that as soon as possible after my death there shall be published my diary and a documentation which will throw the light of truth on many unknown facts. I think that thus I shall be rendering a last service."

And Ciano's mother, too, the old Countess, knew what to expect. A few days before the trial she wrote to Mussolini:

"To a mother's heart all must be forgiven, and now in the torment of my terrible situation, my heart can no longer keep silent. From my anguished heart I utter a cry of indignation against the unreal accusations of those mad slanderers who dare proclaim publicly that 'Ciano must be the first to be killed because he is the richest man in Italy'. The ignoble individuals, who write out of personal jealousy and think they can go far on a road stained with my son's blood, are wrong. They are the same that flattered my son yesterday. Today, because he may be in somebody's way, they want to kill him. . . .

"My son, you must know, is a gentleman, a true gentleman. His greatest patrimony is Honour, Faith and Fatherland.

"Duce, forgive an outburst that comes from the heart of a mother."

This letter was forwarded directly to the Verona judges, and remained unanswered.

The sombre proceedings of this dreadful trial were briefly reported in the Republican Fascist newspapers at the time, and through the German official news agency an outline of them reached the Allied side. But we now have a fuller report. Not only are the official records available, but one of the judges has left his impressions of the proceedings. This terrible document is in effect a report on how the Court served its master, Mussolini. Being so, it is likely to be a true report, which deserves the attention of historians. It is not complete, however. Its composition was interrupted by the vindictive bullet of a patriot.

Domenico Mittiga, its author, was an engineer of Turin. He was a Fascist of the early days, and as a Blackshirt officer he had taken part in the African and Spanish campaigns, and in the Albanian invasion. His love of arms and military life had induced him to abandon his not too brilliant career as an engineer. He regarded himself, self-revealingly, as "a man of action". Mussolini chose him to take part in the Special Tribunal because of his iron sense of discipline and his blind devotion to his Leader. And, indeed, he obeyed to the letter the evil orders given him.

We learn from Mittiga that in the lofty hall of the palace of Castelveccchio a dais had been erected for the members of the Special Tribunal. Behind it the wall was covered by a black cloth on which the lictor's fasces were embroidered, with two Republican Militia men standing on guard on either side. On the right of the judges' chairs a smaller bench had been placed for the six prisoners. In front of the tribunal was a long bench for the defending counsel. On the left was a table for reporters and a stand for movie cameras. The world must see with its own eyes how totally "legal" the proceedings were. A balustrade divided the long room. One side was reserved for the public guests, each of whom, however, had to be identified and searched for firearms before admission. The judges, who had each received the previous evening an anonymous and significant gift of a miniature coffin, did not care to run any risks.

At nine o'clock in the morning on the eighth of January, 1944, the first hearing began. The prisoners entered the hall between a double line of guards, and took their seats in two rows on the stand facing journalists and the cameras. One of UFA's film technicians asked that a large window in front of them be opened, to let in the light of the wintry day and thus illuminate them to better advantage. Then the "Public" was admitted and entered in total silence as though into a funeral chapel.

A sergeant of the Republican Guard announced: "The Extraordinary Special Tribunal. Please rise as the Court enters."

All those bearing arms stood to attention. The others, with the exception of the six prisoners, raised their arms rigidly to

salute the nine men in black shirts who climbed onto the dais.

The tribunal was presided over by Aldo Vecchini, and, besides Mittiga himself, was composed of Celso Riva, Renzo Montagna, Giovanni Riggio, Vito Casalnuovo, Enrico Vezzadini, Mario Pagliani, and Otello Gaddi. Of these men Mittiga was later killed in Turin by partisans, Casalnuovo was shot by patriots at Dongo, and the others lost in the chaos of anti-Fascist insurrection in Northern Italy at the end of April 1945.

Tommaso Leucadito, the clerk, called out the names of the defendants and read the act of accusation against all nineteen. All were accused "of having on the occasion of the vote taken by the Grand Council of Fascism, on the 25th of July, 1943, in Rome, conspired among themselves, and attempted to destroy the independence of the State, and of having thwarted by fostering illusions of easy terms of peace, not only the moral resistance of the nation but military operations, in this manner giving aid and comfort to the enemy".

The president then turned to the defendants.

The first to be called was the aged Marshal De Bono. He wore all his military decorations on his uniform. He spoke slowly, but later with more feeling.

He first told how on a certain day in July, 1943 (he did not clearly remember whether it was the 19th, 20th or 21st), he received a telegram from Scorza inviting him to the Chancery of the Party in the Palazzo Littorio, where he found Teruzzi, Bottai, Albini and Cianetti, and either De Cicco or De Marsico (he could not recall which of the two). Farinacci was there also, and spoke first, describing the military situation of the armed forces, and particularly the anti-fascist sentiment in the army, of which all spoke. The discussion was a lengthy one. The theme of the nation's hardships came up, and it was then decided to go together to the Duce to ask his advice about starting a propaganda campaign among the masses. Subsequently they did go to Mussolini. The situation was then examined under all its aspects.

The Marshal added that on the following day Bignardi came to see him to bring him the Order of the Day that Grandi was preparing for the coming session of the Grand Council. De

Bono mentioned that he knew little of Orders of the Day, and had never been a politician. Upon reading this he saw only two aspects of it: the summons to unity and the return of military power to the King.

De Bono then described the session of the Grand Council itself, reporting Mussolini as having said, after Grandi's speech: "This Order of the Day places us in a dilemma. Either the King whom I have served for twenty years, and who only a few days ago demonstrated the esteem he has for me, confirms his faith in me, in which case I know what to do; or he withdraws his mandate, in which case things will change radically."

The President interrupted: "Thus you were aware, even though you are not a politician, that in voting Grandi's motion you were voting against the Duce?"

"I am not trying to hide the full consciousness of my vote," the Marshal replied. "I knew what I was doing, and I wanted to do it. My country, which for over fifty years I have served as a soldier, was going to ruin. One man was leading it towards disaster, and it was urgent to stop that man. I considered it my duty to vote thus, and I would repeat my action tomorrow."

"Did you have any contacts with the King before or after July 25th?"

"Never. Neither before nor after. Neither direct nor indirect. I do not have to speak with my King to know how to serve him."

And then the Marshal added: "All this seems so futile. Someone has decided that I must die. I am old, very old, and you rob me of nothing. But be quick."

Without waiting to be dismissed he started back to his seat on the prisoner's bench. Neither the president nor the public prosecutor, it seemed, dared to continue the interrogation. Some sympathetic murmurs arose from the public. The Guards themselves seemed to waver. The president interrupted the session.

When the hearing reopened some minutes later the President called Pareschi, who was Minister of Agriculture in Mussolini's government before July 25th.

Pareschi, although young in years, seemed aged and stunned. He too told of the session of the Grand Council, but stated

that he learned of Grandi's intention to attack Mussolini only a few minutes before the meeting began.

He was often interrupted by the public prosecutor, who wanted to make him confess to a previous plot. Finally he exclaimed: "All responsible Italians were against Mussolini and his war. All were conspiring. Forty million Italians. But among the members of the Grand Council there was no agreement. The cup was full to the brim. Grandi poured in the drop that made it spill over."

It was the turn of Cianetti, the only one whose life was to be saved. He stood up painfully, and asked the Tribunal to allow him to make his deposition seated where he was. The request was granted, which seemed to encourage him, and he began thus:

"I am not guilty. I am a Fascist, have always been a Fascist, and have never in thought or action betrayed my pledge of faith to the Duce. If there is a traitor here, it is not I. If someone betrayed Italy, he is among the generals."

Cianetti went on to tell the story of his past activity as an organizer of Fascist syndicates. "Organizing the labourers of Carrara as of Arezzo, in the country as in the town, I have always faithfully served the Duce and the Fascist ideal. I have done active fighting during this war as an artillery captain in Albania. Even at that time I noticed the betrayal of Fascism, of the Fascist war, by some of high rank in the Army. Pantelleria, Sicily, and Augusta are evident proof of the generals' treason. They did not mind losing the war. On the contrary, to overthrow Fascism they wanted the enemy to win, and on every occasion made things easy for the enemy. I realized these things. One day I went on purpose to Scorza to denounce the generals. I spoke on the subject with the Duce, and he answered: 'We'll see to that at the session of the Grand Council'."

Cianetti went on accumulating evidence of his good faith, but the President rebuked him.

"If you are so tired and ill that you can't come to the stand to make your deposition, at least try to conclude, to come to the point. Your past political life does not interest the Tribunal, but your activity regarding the plot of July 25th."

Cianetti excused himself, and gave his own version of the famous session.

On the morning of July 25th, he said, a telephone call from the Presidency of the Chamber of Deputies had asked him to go to Speaker Grandi's office. He went not knowing the motive of this call. There Grandi had given him to read the Order of the Day prepared for the evening's session.

"I admit that perhaps I was superficial, naïve . . ."

"All paraphrases which mean stupid or perhaps guilty?" interrupted the Public Prosecutor.

"Stupid, if you wish, certainly not guilty. The fact is that in reading the Order of the Day I did not have the impression that it in any way contained a condemnation of Mussolini. On the contrary, it made allusions to the functions of the régime, to the defence of the integrity of the nation, to inviting the King to assume the command of the Armed Forces—all things that appeared to lead to a good end. I did not understand the insidiousness which lay hidden in those words, and I promised that I would back the Order of the Day. I had only one doubt. The Order mentioned returning to the fulfilment of Article V of the Constitution. I asked Grandi for an explanation of this, and he answered that it was of no consequence. I believed that, and therein lay my unpardonable ingenuousness."

"But were you not familiar with the Statute of the Kingdom?" asked the President.

"I must admit that I was not. I have never read it. On the other hand, I have never considered myself the King's minister, but a minister of Fascism. I saw in the motion only the means of putting the more serious responsibilities of the war, which was going disastrously, on the King's shoulders, and this idea pleased me. The monarchy has been too far from the front line during this war."

Cianetti then spoke of Grandi's part in the Grand Council proceedings. "He was a traitor. But I did not know that. If I had understood it on that tragic night I would have done something about it. I would have killed him with my own hands in front of the Duce."

"What did you do after the Grand Council? When did you

finally reach the conclusion that under appearances Grandi concealed treason?" asked the President.

"I went home exhausted and stunned. I couldn't sleep. The evening's events went through my mind, leaving it in chaos until I finally saw light. After ten hours' reflection I understood the trap into which I had fallen. I took pen in hand and wrote to the Duce. I asked his forgiveness, sent in my resignation as Minister, and asked to be sent to the front as an officer.

"Perhaps I have erred. But it was pure ignorance on my part, certainly not bad faith. I am ready to pay for my mistake even if it costs me dearly. But I swear that all my acts have always been dedicated to faith and enthusiasm for Fascism and for the Duce in whom I have always believed and in whom I always will believe."

Cianetti, who had half risen from his seat, fell back, hiding his face in his folded arms. At his side, Ciano ostentatiously looked the other way.

The session was adjourned until after luncheon. During the interval something happened. It is hinted at in Mittiga's report. Mussolini, from the end of the telephone to Lake Garda, intervened.

So far, from Mussolini's point of view, the trial had not gone too well. Its principal aim was, of course, assured—the judicial murder of the men who had rebelled against the Duce. But its secondary purpose was to demonstrate to the world that a dynastic-military plot had existed against his person, and that the Grand Council had served as its instrument. The first depositions, in particular De Bono's, had not helped to establish this arbitrary thesis.

Mussolini apparently told the President over the telephone that proceedings would have to be modified. Especially to be feared were the depositions of Ciano and Marinelli. So when the trial recommenced the President announced that to "save time" he would no longer interrogate the defendants, but would have their previously prepared statements read aloud.

He proceeded to order the reading of Gottardi's statement. In a monotonous, nasal voice the clerk read the lengthy document, following it up with the others.

Gottardi, in his statement, denied the accusation of treason and recalled his past as a soldier. He said he did not know the other members of the Grand Council—it was the first time he had taken part—and that he knew nothing of Grandi's motion until the very time of the session. He voted in favour of it because he had the impression that it would "liberate the Duce from the grave responsibilities of military command at a time when the war was taking such a bad turn".

Marinelli's deposition was very similar to Gottardi's. He, too, denied the accusations, adding that during the entire session of the Grand Council he had not opened his mouth. He had voted for Grandi's Order of the Day, for "he had felt that it contained nothing that would harm either the Duce or Fascism".

Mittiga observes that Marinelli appeared the ghost of his former self. Once accustomed to command and to luxurious living, a few months of imprisonment had turned him into a trembling puppet.

Here was the President's chance to bring out the plot *motif*. Apart from Cianetti, Marinelli seemed the weakest of the six. So Vecchini told him:

"Even if you didn't speak during the Grand Council, you certainly must have expressed your opinions during the private meetings that were held before the session. Be sincere; that will help you."

Marinelli, however, did not perceive the pole extended to him, and in all sincerity answered: "But your Honour, I never saw any of the members of the Grand Council before the meeting. I was in Rovigo, and I knew nothing whatsoever about any of it."

The President's countenance darkened; his plan had not been successful. He ordered Ciano's deposition to be read. Ciano was the most important of the defendants. There was more than a political interest in his case. High human tragedy hung over it. It was known that at that very moment his wife was in Saló waiting to be received by her father to plead for his life.

Ciano also pleaded not guilty in his deposition: "It may be that I committed an error, but it is out of the question to

mention treason, which would contrast with all my activity as a soldier, a Fascist and a man." The statement emphasized that since 8th February, 1943, the day he had left the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to become Ambassador to the Holy See, he had never been able to approach the Duce, although he had many times tried to. It implicitly excluded any premeditated plot in stating that Ciano had heard of the assembly of the Grand Council only on the 22nd of July. On the Friday before the meeting he had gone to Bottai's home, where he had found Grandi. During the discussion it had been decided to profit from the meeting to try to convince the Duce to break away from German influence and to hasten the end of the conflict, if necessary by means of a separate peace. No definite plan had, however, been arranged. Grandi, however, had pointed out the necessity, as a first step, of compelling Mussolini to restore the military command to the King.

"It seemed to me," Ciano declared, "that, with such a high incentive, Fascism would be able to make this sacrifice. That is why I supported Grandi's thesis. Never did he suggest, or I imagine, that the Order of the Day could cause the fall of the régime. On the contrary it was intended to strengthen it by mustering those national forces that were willing to co-operate for the salvation of the Fatherland, but who had been alienated by party cards and seniority. I wanted a genuinely totalitarian *fascio* from the King down to the humblest citizen, each at his post of action, assuming his own responsibilities. If I had been able to foresee what happened, not only would I not have given my support, but I would have opposed it."

After the Grand Council, the statement continued, Ciano had gone to Badoglio to ask a passport for himself and his family. Badoglio had told him that the King desired him to remain at his post as Ambassador to the Holy See, and not to worry. Instead, shortly afterwards he had been put under strict surveillance by Badoglio's police, and had managed to escape only through a well-organized flight. He reaffirmed that he had not been disloyal to the Duce, and that he had every intention of warning him of the state of mind of many of the Grand Council members had he but had the opportunity to see him before the session took place.

Ciano listened to the reading of his own statement with his arms crossed and a set expression as of a man who has no illusions and knows what is awaiting him. He had received a letter from his wife the night before, and he knew of her fruitless attempts to reach the Duce.

The Public Prosecutor tried hard to obtain from Ciano the admission of some plot.

"You signed Grandi's Order of the Day *before* its presentation?" he asked.

"Yes," Ciano replied, "a few hours before. But I also knew—Grandi had told me—that Scorza had taken a copy of the text to the Duce. When one is plotting to overthrow someone by treason, one does not as a rule forewarn him, nor does one inform him of the means that are to be employed."

"But why didn't you personally inform your father-in-law? Given your personal relationship with him, it would seem normal."

"I have already said why in the deposition that you have just read. Even for me, Mussolini was totally unapproachable. For six months I had been unable to see him alone."

The interrogation was over. It had proved nothing, notwithstanding the efforts of the Tribunal, and had demonstrated nothing that was not already known. A group of men had reached the limit of their passive resignation and, using their positions as members of the highest body of the régime, had expressed by vote their distrust in their leader. No plot, no premeditation, nor carefully prepared palace intrigue.

The farce continued. According to the rules of procedure, witnesses must next be interrogated. What witnesses? What evidence was required? There was no disputing of fact. But some witnesses were necessary to give a more judicial flavour to the proceedings.

The seven members of the Grand Council who voted in favour of Mussolini were the witnesses summoned. Only four, however, were present. The others, Buffarini, Biggini and Farinacci, using, as the President said, "their lawful privilege, due to the positions they occupy, to make their depositions in writing", sent their declarations to be read.

But first Suardo, the only man who had abstained from voting, was called to the witness box. He said he had at first decided to adhere to Grandi's motion, but had afterwards changed his mind "because I was under the impression that in it there might be something the Duce would disapprove of".

After an interval for another telephone call to Lake Garda, Carlo Scorza, ex-Secretary of the Party, was summoned to make his deposition. The usual tale was told, and then the Public Prosecutor inquired:

"Are you of the opinion that the Grand Council as a whole were inclined to follow the line of resisting the enemy to the last, or were they inclined towards surrender?"

"The majority, without a doubt, wanted peace," answered Scorza.

"Representing," shouted Ciano from his seat, "the will of the entire country."

"Did you ever speak of this state of affairs to the Duce?" the prosecutor asked Scorza.

"Most certainly, and I also wrote him two letters advising him to leave the military Ministries and make a concession to public opinion," Scorza imprudently replied.

"Why isn't Scorza here with us?" Ciano again interrupted. Scorza turned towards Ciano and was about to answer back, when the President intervened and admonished the defendants not to interrupt the witnesses.

"You are perfectly right, your Excellency," said Ciano. "What is the use of my speaking?"

Bonsembiante, defending counsel, asked the witness if he had the impression that a plot had been prearranged.

Scorza replied: "I had the definite impression that something was going on against the Duce and the régime, but I cannot state that I knew of any precise plot."

This reply got Scorza into trouble, and later he was brought to trial before the Extraordinary Special Tribunal. He was acquitted, however, on the ground that "the acts of which he was accused were committed through superficiality and incapacity".

General Galbiati was next called. He commanded the Fascist Militia previous to July 25th.

"Why did you not mobilize your Blackshirts the day after the session of the Grand Council?" the President asked.

"I did, but only at three o'clock in the afternoon of Sunday, when Mussolini told me to. I sent out a circular telegram to all dependent commands, and ordered the mechanized division camping near Bracciano to move towards Rome. I was not obeyed. I learnt later that the telegrams were intercepted by Senise (Chief of Police) and substituted by orders commanding the Blackshirts to place themselves at the disposal of Badoglio."

The trial dragged on, to little apparent purpose, other witnesses being examined and other statements read. The prosecution still found it hard to establish a plot.

At last, at six o'clock, proceedings were adjourned, and the accused were taken to their cells in the prison of the Scalzi. Here Ciano found his wife awaiting him with their eldest boy Fabrizio. Edda had just come from Saló, where she had finally succeeded in seeing her father, and she told Ciano of her fruitless plea. Ciano himself has recorded the incident in his diary. Mussolini had listened to his daughter's plea with a stony stare. His answer had been: "Fascist justice will follow its course." To Edda's insistence, appealing to his heart as father and grandfather, he had added: "Before the supreme necessity of Rome, Roman fathers never for a moment hesitated in sacrificing their sons. Here there is neither father nor grandfather. There is only Fascism's Duce." With a cry of desperation and horror, Edda had torn herself away.

Fifteen minutes' conversation were allowed Ciano. The warden's firm hand on the woman's shoulder conducted her away from the cell as Ciano, embracing his fourteen-year-old son, muttered the one word: "Remember!"

At nine o'clock on Sunday morning, January 9th, the farce of the trial began again. The cardinal document of the trial was read, by the President himself. It was Cavallero's last letter, written before his death. On this the whole thesis of a dynastic plot was based.

Opinion is divided on the genuineness of this document, and it is perhaps rather suspicious that it should have been produced so late in the trial, after so many unavailing attempts to prove the existence of a plot.

Marshal Cavallero had been put under arrest when Badoglio came to power. He had been General Ambrosio's predecessor as Chief of General Staff. In captivity he was said to have applied himself to writing this long account of the circumstances surrounding the *coup d'état*. On September 12th the Germans freed him, and he went to live in the Grand Hotel. In the early morning of the 14th he was found dead on a bench in the hotel garden. A pistol lying beside him indicated suicide, but the position of the wounds on the left side of the head led most people to believe that he had been prudently "put out of the way"—for he knew too much. The document he was said to have written most conveniently turned up on top of Badoglio's desk, when that potentate fled before the menace of a German occupation of Rome.

The document, assuming it to be genuine, constitutes the most powerful evidence that the General Staff had indeed premeditated Mussolini's overthrow. It says that up to November 1942 the question of the Duce's successor had constantly been under discussion by the highest military authorities, who were hoping for a situation in which the King could successfully nominate a new government. It had been decided that the best person to succeed Mussolini was Marshal Badoglio, and, in Cavallero's own opinion, the most favourable circumstances for such a change arose at the time of the fall of Tunisia. He himself expressed this opinion to the *aide-de-camp* of the Prince of Piedmont, who assured him that he would bring his views to the notice of "the highest authorities".

With the fall of Sicily, Cavallero's ideas took a more concrete form. He thought that, if the King were to revoke Mussolini's responsibility for the conduct of the war, and accordingly reassume military power, the rest would follow naturally. The new government could then be placed in Badoglio's hands.

In the meantime, Cavallero's plan was to make active propaganda for these plans among various outstanding personalities of the magistracy and the Senate, while an important industrialist, Luigi Burgo, had declared himself prepared to finance the initiative by putting at the conspirators' disposal

over 100,000,000 lire. Burgo, however, when he was later tried for this by a Special Tribunal, was found not guilty.

The dead man's document concludes by saying that Cavallero also had conversations with General Ambrosio and Marshal Badoglio, who, to avoid giving the plot the character of a military *pronunciamento*, had decided to reach their aims constitutionally, by means of the Grand Council.

Such was the *pièce de résistance* of the prosecution, which said exactly what Mussolini wanted it to.

Now it was the turn of the Public Prosecutor, Fortunato, to speak.

He began by declaring that it was the duty of the Tribunal to re-establish the moral order that had been destroyed by the vote of the Grand Council. The Mussolini idea, he said, in order to triumph, had been obliged from 1919 to 1921 to sweep away all democratic and liberal ideas. To reach this aim many men had fallen, but the Mussolini idea was triumphant.

In 1922, however, there had been the agreement with the Monarchy which had obliged Fascism to continue on its path carrying the dead weight of the House of Savoy, which had always followed the traditional policy of absorbing revolutionary upheavals until they no longer represented any danger. The Crown wished the Revolution to grow only to the point at which it did not conflict with the private interests of the dynasty. Thus, when military defeats, caused by the continuous sabotage of the General Staff, placed the Crown in definite danger, its destructive activity began. Cavallero's plot was clear evidence of the fact.

And so the Public Prosecutor demanded the supreme penalty for the accused, although the chief of them, he said, were not present.

"As a man," he said, "I may hesitate, but in me beats the heart of an Italian. For that reason I am obliged to ask you for a verdict of total responsibility for all the nineteen defendants, and a sentence of death, in the form that the law establishes for such treason. I speak in the name of the Revolution, and my demand is part of my duty. I assume full responsibility for it. But you are men, as well as judges. It is your right and privilege to decide as men."

Making a show of this appeal to clemency, the Public Prosecutor referred to various articles of the Criminal Code which allowed for extenuating circumstances to be taken into account in cases of treason. "These nineteen, it is true," he said, "placed military advantage in the hands of their country's enemies, but . . ." and so on, with more false pleas for mercy. Finally, turning to the prisoners, he said: "By concluding thus, I yield up your lives for the life of Italy, and perhaps my own life too."

Sunday afternoon and Monday morning were devoted to the case for the defence. Defending counsel, appointed by the Court, were clearly anxious not to compromise themselves, and kept their arguments on a dry and legal plane. Decency compelled them to make out some sort of case for the non-existence of premeditation or treasonable intent, but they dared not embark on political argument or commend the essential patriotism of their clients. Cianetti's defender, of course, was able to make play with the repentance expressed in the letter he wrote to Mussolini next day.

By ten on Monday morning the Tribunal was able to retire to deliberate. Hours passed and the discussion, as we find from Mittiga's notes, was very animated. The majority of the judges were privately against a death sentence. It was all very difficult, and the President was forced to get into his car and drive to Saló to consult the Duce. He remained away for about an hour and a half, and then returned with strict orders. Mussolini, in an access of fury, had sent him back with this decision—"Either the defendants' heads or your own".

So at half past one the Tribunal returned to the courtroom, and pronounced death for all the accused, with the exception of Cianetti, who received a sentence of thirty years' imprisonment.

Marinelli collapsed in his chair. Cianetti murmured "Thank you, thank you". The others shouted "Long live Italy".

In the villa at Saló, Mussolini is with Claretta. He gives instructions that he is not to be disturbed until after the executions. No one must see him, no letter must be delivered.

In the prison of the Scalzi, Edda has her last meeting with her husband. She has written a letter to her father. She is sure

the sentence will not be carried out. But Galeazzo Ciano shakes his head. He embraces his wife, and the son she has brought with her, and returns to the cell where the others are waiting.

Father Ghiotti, prison chaplain, is told there is no time to shrive each man separately. So the five men kneel and say a general confession together, like ancient Christian martyrs in the arena; and together they receive absolution.

The place of execution is a field a few miles out of the city. The guards are German SS troops, the firing squad is composed of thirty-two men of the Italian Black Brigades. Caruso, the Verona Chief of Police—later shot in Rome—directs the execution. Few officials assist. There is no public.

The condemned men are tied on to five school benches, their backs to the firing squad. Marinelli has had to be carried, as he has fainted. Ciano turns to De Bono, who still wears his marshal's uniform, and says: "You are the oldest, take the right side." Pareschi, before being tied, takes off his fur-lined jacket and gives it to the soldier who accompanies him: "You keep it, I'll no longer need it."

The UFA cameras are ready, to make the film which is to serve as a warning to all who dare defy dictators. But Herr Müller, the chief cameraman, clicks his tongue. "Dear, dear, this light. These dull winter mornings. Really at the moment I can't possibly guarantee good results."

So the execution is postponed, until it should grow lighter. No time for confessing sins to God, but the German cameraman's word is law. In the bitter cold, the men wait for two long hours.

"O.K. for light." The high authority of the cinema has spoken. The prisoners are reciting the Angelus together.

Ciano wrenches himself free of his ropes, so that he can face the rifles, and falls from his chair. That is why, when the order to fire is given, it is only he who is not killed instantaneously. Caruso approaches him, therefore, and shoots him through the head.

A squad of SS men come forward to bury the bodies. Father Ghiotti, who is still kneeling beside them, rises and intervenes.

"The bodies belong to me. I will answer for them and dispose of them." Hesitatingly the SS men withdraw.

The five bodies remain watched over by the priest, who afterwards returns them to their families.

The brief news reaches the solitary tyrant in Saló—"All is over". The man who conveys the news also holds out a letter. Mussolini nervously opens the envelope; it is his daughter's letter in which she desperately begs the life of her husband and the father of her children.

All is indeed over. The Verona trial may be considered the last active gesture of the fallen dictator. Once his vengeance has been accomplished he no longer participates in the life of that unfortunate piece of Italy that the folly of his generals has abandoned to the domination of Italy's hereditary enemy. He no longer influences or even follows the course of events which continue in a separate sphere. History abandons him—touching him again only to carry him forward to his ignominious end.

There are those who cannot adjust themselves to the idea of such passivity in a man the echo of whose political agitation rang throughout the world for so many years. They assume that the Germans, having secured him as a necessary figure-head, isolated him by force, surrounding his residence with sentries and allowing him only the use of a single telephone line controlled by the Gestapo. But the best evidence suggests that physically he was free, and could have made himself troublesome to his German masters had he known how. He was his own prisoner, and we must leave it to the psychiatrists to explain how and why.

The drama that spread blood throughout Italy continued without Mussolini. Behind the war fought between the Germans and the Allies a network of hate and reprisals was cast over the land. Italians against Italians. A nation oppressed by a handful of criminals whose number dwindles with the approach of justice, awakens, organizes and resists. The Germans enforce public security only in those zones that are of military interest to them. The rest of the country is in the hands of Pavolini's Black Brigades and Ricci's National Republican Guards.

The trial and execution in June of Admirals Campioni and Mascherpa for having obeyed the King of Italy after Septem-

ber 8th, and fought the Germans in the Dodecanese, was the last tragic echo of the *coup d'état* in Northern Italy. Scorza had been tried shortly before, and had been acquitted.

All that belonged to the past. Present reality was the slow, inexorable northward march of the Allies, and the emergence in every town and city of the Committee of National Liberation with its sabotage and *guerrilla* and its preparation for the final blow to liberate the country.

Functionaries and officers steal through the lines southwards, to where the new Italian government in Salerno is busy reconstructing the state organization on the ruins of Fascism. Old men like Minister Riccardi, generals like Pirzio-Biroli, young diplomatists like Gino Roberti cross the country on foot, and, after weeks and months, succeed in reaching the King's government.

On 4th June Rome is liberated. Allied commanders address the crowds from that long empty Balcony at the Palazzo Venezia. The citadel is taken and the final shame of a lost empire proclaimed.

Two days later comes the trumpet call from the 'north—D Day. The Fascist Republic is caught between two fires. It is now merely a case of *sauve qui peut*.

The death throes of the Fascist Republic are hardly interesting in themselves. Pavolini publishes the eighteen basic points of the new party, but his federal secretaries are killed, and public meetings have to be held under the armed protection of the Black Brigades. Graziani tries to reorganize an army, but the Germans disperse it. In a try-out of some picked battalions from the Naval Division of San Marco and the Alpine Monte Rosa Division at the front south of Bologna, thirty per cent deserters are counted on the first day of fighting.

President Roosevelt's proclamation to the Italian nation on October 12th encourages patriotic resistance on one side of the line and patriotic reconstruction on the other. He says:

For over twenty years we in America have watched with anxious eyes the steps taken by the Fascist gangsters to enslave the Italian people. The Italian people were thrown into an alliance they detested.

Mussolini, the would-be Caesar, under-estimated the will of his people; large numbers of them were brave enough to rally to our ranks.

"The American army—including thousands of Americans of Italian descent—entered Italy not as conquerors but as liberators. The civilian administration in Italy has been fully discussed by me with the British Prime Minister. The British Government is agreed that as the problem is great, so also is our responsibility to help. To the people of Italy we have pledged our help—and we will keep the faith."

Already, in some parts north of the advancing line, such as Domodossola and in Val d' Aosta, the partisans succeed in setting up free islets of independence, where neither the Fascist nor the Gestapo writ can run.

Early in 1945 the Allies liberate Ravenna and the little town of Predappio, where on one of the village houses an inscription recalls that there "in the year 1883 was born Benito Mussolini, Duce of Italy".

On April 10th the Allied Forces in Italy open their big and decisive offensive. The twenty-seven German divisions that constitute the garrison of the Reich in Italy fall back under the pressure, and partisan formations, having received instructions from Allied headquarters to enter into action, prepare a total insurrection which is to begin on April 25th.

At midnight on that day, while the Duce is already speeding northwards in search of an illusory safety, this message was broadcast by the captured Milan radio.

"Patriots, the hour of a general attack has struck. Out with Germany! Patriots of Genoa, Milan, Turin—strike now!"

CHAPTER VI

THE LAST BETRAYAL

IF THE CIRCUMSTANCES of the Italian Armistice in September 1943 were those of a romantic novel, those that led to the surrender of the German troops in Italy in April, 1945, could furnish material for a detective story.

The characters in the tale are a cardinal, a Swiss scientist, an Italian baron and a colonel of the Gestapo. The first three are inspired either by a sense of humanity or by love of intrigue, the last, the villain of the piece, is led by the hope, finally crowned with success, of saving himself from paying a terrible debt of blood contracted a year before.

On March 23rd, 1944, anniversary of the founding of the Fascist party, a bomb exploded as an SS platoon of the Bozen battalion was marching through Via Rasella in Rome, killing thirty-two German soldiers. It had been hidden in a refuse cart. As a reprisal, the German Command ordered the execution of 335 hostages. They were thrown into lorries and driven into a catacomb outside Rome called the Ardeatine Groves, where they were massacred by machine-guns. The entrance to the cave was then blown in, burying dead and wounded together.

That night, monks of a nearby monastery heard excruciating groans and cries, and, after the Germans had left, tried to dig through the catacomb walls. They succeeded in saving one man.

The SS troops who did this deed were commanded by a colonel named Eugen Dolmann. It is he who played the leading part in the final German betrayal of Italy. By doing so he won ignoble freedom, and his name does not appear on the Allied list of war criminals.

Many wondered, when the photographs and communiqués of the surrender of German forces in Italy were published in the papers, why the vanquished troops were represented not by German generals of the regular army but by two officers of the SS troops, with whom as a rule the Anglo-Americans

did not make contacts. The two German signatories were, in fact, General Karl Wolf, commander of the SS troops in Italy, and his *aide-de-camp*, Colonel Eugen Dolmann.

Why had the Anglo-Americans accepted as delegates these two grim personages, instead of insisting that officers of the regular German army, as elsewhere, should sign the instrument of surrender? Who were they, anyway, that they should usurp this important symbolic function? And, most interesting of all, why were they never put on the list of war criminals, although the far less bloodguilty regular commanders in Italy are all duly there?

A Swiss scientist, Professor Hussmann, Director of the Zugerberg Institute, provides the answer, in a series of articles which we have reason to believe were inspired if not written by him, and which appeared in a Zurich weekly *Die Weltwoche* on the 8th, 15th and 22nd June, 1945.

In the wake of D Day, it will be remembered, the awesome threat of a "scorched earth" retreat hung over Northern Italy. It was thought that the Germans might cut their losses in Italy altogether, and it was known that if they did so they would carry away everything they could not destroy, and destroy all they could not carry away. All roads, all bridges, all factories, all cities would have been ravaged, and all Italian boys and men capable of bearing arms would have been deported.

It never happened, because Hitler decided against it. Soon after the Allies in the north had reached the Seine, he expressed his hostility to "the very dangerous mentality of evacuation and retreat". The Army of Italy, he said, must not retire into the inner German fortress, but fight on.

But it would not have happened, whatever Hitler had decided. Other forces had come into play to save the castles and churches, the lives and the livelihood of the busy Lombard plain. Odd tricks of fate, odd chances, continued to play about the expiring Fascist empire.

While Mussolini roamed the rooms of his *buen retiro* at Saló, acting his part over again or daydreaming in the arms of his mistress, other men were assuming the responsibility for Italian destinies. It is typical that his Ministers—that phantom Fascist Republican Government—were not among them; they

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were already busy with plans for personal escape into Germany. The older Italy was again taking a hand in the country's destiny and among the representatives of that older Italy was the Most Eminent Lord Ildefonso, Cardinal Schuster, Archbishop of Milan.

This excellent prelate, as harmless as a dove, was also as wise as a serpent. That is why he was seen consorting so much with a sinister Colonel of the Gestapo, Dolmann by name, who was not exactly a devout son of the Church.

Behind Dolmann's smart and blustering exterior, the old cardinal, skilled in reading the minds of men, saw fear—desperate, all-compelling fear. He felt he was on sure ground in broaching his proposal.

If the Germans should decide to evacuate Italy, he suggested would it really be wise, by a scorched-earth policy, to increase the sum of hatred and lengthen the tale of vengeance? Could not Colonel Dolmann induce his chief, General Wolf, to abstain from this destruction? The Cardinal, on his side, could perhaps persuade the partisans, already numerous, well organized and supplied daily by the Allies, to cease their guerilla warfare, and allow the Germans to leave undisturbed. This was a service, the Cardinal pointed out suavely, that Dolmann had in his power to render humanity. It might not go unrewarded, even in this life.

The colonel was interested. The moral issue presented by His Eminence affected him deeply, he said. He would try to talk the matter over with his chief, although of course he could give no guarantee of success.

Wolf, we may be sure, when the matter was broached to him, pretended it was an outrageous suggestion. But he too was interested, all the same. After all, if the worst came to the worst, he fully expected to be victimized. His colleagues of the regular army were, he supposed, safe, under the laws and usages of war—this supposition was wrong, but it was generally accepted by Germany and Italy at the time; whereas he, a mere commander of political militia, was clearly cut out as a so-called war criminal. Why should he not look after his own interests, as much as he knew the generals were looking after theirs?

So he, also, suddenly became alive to the value of Christian charity. "We must respect what these ecclesiastics say," he said to Dolmann. "They have a considerable political importance. Humour the old gentleman, and keep in touch with him." The two German gangsters understood each other perfectly.

So Dolmann returned to the cardinal, in the guise of an earnest disciple, and told of the hopes he had of a successful conclusion to his mission.

The cardinal, for his part, had been bluffing, and had now to back his own words. He had told Dolmann that the partisans were ready to come to an agreement, but really he had not contacted them at all, and had no idea what their reaction to his proposal would be. At once he must find the right person to approach the partisans, and tie together the two ends of the thread he was spinning. He chose as his envoy a priest who had been a military chaplain, and was well loved in his mountain parish for his cheery sincere countenance and respected for the force with which he banged the pulpit to emphasize a point in his Sunday sermon.

Don Giuseppe Bicchierai departed with the cardinal's blessing for a village in Alta Valtellina, where he found the partisans' headquarters. There he spoke long with General Cadorna, discussing the basis for an eventual treaty in the case of a German evacuation of Northern Italy.

The Germans did not evacuate northern Italy. Hitler, taking a desperate resolution, ordered Kesselring to defend every yard of Italian territory to the death. But, behind this military determination, the political rot had set in. The Gestapo through a village priest were in touch with the partisans, bargaining for their alley of escape. A channel of communication existed and it passed through the Archbishop's Palace in Milan. And for minor, but still important purposes, it came to be increasingly used.

It was through this channel, with the intervention of Cardinal Nasalli-Rocca, that Bologna was declared an open city, that exchanges of hostages and prisoners were agreed upon, and that certain "respected" zones were established in the mountains which the Germans did not enter. The worst

horrors of guerilla warfare, with its ambushes and reprisals, were thus avoided. The period of mass deportations, of the murder of hostages, of sudden swoops on public assemblies—to which the partisans had retaliated by the execution of Giovanni Gentile in Florence, Athos Cappelli in Turin and Aldo Resega in Milan—was over. The scanty formations of the Black Brigades continued, when they could, their terroristic activities, but the Gestapo, unaccountably, was on good behaviour.

Simultaneously another man was working towards the same ends. The reserve of ecclesiastical circles does not allow us to know whether he, the banker Baron Luigi Parrilli, was acting in concert with Cardinal Schuster, but the facts suggest a close link between them.

Luigi Parrilli, who before the war had been a representative for many years of American business interests in Italy, left Milan in the month of January, 1945, for Switzerland. He justified his departure by affirming that his health required the bracing air of the Swiss mountains. Colonel Dolmann was impressed by this argument with singular ease, and set to to help with the visas. He also used the opportunity to bring out his newfound Christian zeal, and to remark wistfully how nice it would be if an "honourable" end could be found to the world struggle.

Safe in Zurich, the baron stayed with his friend Professor Hussmann, who is the source of our story. The Professor deposited with the Swiss authorities 10,000 Swiss francs to guarantee the baron's financial status. He then introduced him to an American diplomatist, Allen Dulles, who was already in contact with Cardinal Schuster. Dulles held somewhat aloof, but put Parrilli in contact with his assistant of Austrian descent, Dr. Gaevernitz. Privately he suggested to Gaevernitz that it would not be at all a bad plan if he could get in touch with Dolmann direct.

"One evening," writes Professor Hussmann, "a strange man called at my house to read the gas meter. It turned out to be Dolmann in disguise. It was impossible to know whether he had come with Wolf's consent or not. Parrilli admitted he had summoned him from Milan."

It must have been a strange meeting, this between the German, the Italian and the Swiss. Hussmann hurried to telephone Dulles, who, however, still wished to remain in the background. In the end, all three went out to the secluded Café Bianchi, to meet Gaevernitz.

Dolmann's frankness rather embarrassed the first conversation. He had left his piety behind in Italy. Instead of talking about the welfare of humanity, he as good as admitted the abominations of his own past. These, in fact, were his real credentials.

He was well aware, he said, that his name ought to be on the list of war criminals, and well towards the top. His proposal was simply this—that if he were able to help in hastening the end of the war, thus saving the lives of many Allied soldiers, this should be taken as cancelling his past.

Gaevernitz was a little taken aback by the dreadful candour of this approach. It was the least he could do to ask for some tangible proof, not of Dolmann's sincerity (a quality in which he was manifestly lacking), but of the reality of his present intentions and of his power of carrying them out.

After an awkward pause it was Hussmann, apparently, who found a solution to this problem. Why should not Dolmann show what he could do by freeing and escorting to the Swiss border some outstanding hostage awaiting execution in Italy?

Dolmann immediately agreed, and serenely asked the name of any hostage particularly desired. Gaevernitz stared. It seemed too good to be true. Really, Dulles ought to hear about this. So he slipped out of the café to hurry round to his chief.

Dulles was still sceptical. "Ask for Parri," he said laconically. "You'll see that he'll find some way of saying no."

Ferruccio Parri, later Prime Minister of Italy, was one of the outstanding Gestapo prisoners. A short time before, General Cadorna had given him the command of the entire resistance movement in northern Italy. He had been arrested during a skirmish, and was awaiting death in a prison at Verona.

When Gaevernitz mentioned the name, Dolmann blanched. He had not really expected so hard a task. And when Parrilli asked that a second patriot leader should be sent along as well

—say, Usmiani, who was also awaiting death in the Verona prison—he began to make excuses.

“You couldn’t have chosen a more difficult pair,” he muttered. “Mussolini has personally demanded their lives. It would all be terribly difficult to explain in Berlin.”

“That is your own affair,” replied Gaevernitz. “These are the conditions we propose if we are to continue this contact.”

Dolmann said goodbye, striving to hide his disappointment, and with Parrilli left that night for Milan.

Eight days later, Professor Hussmann received a telephone message. It was from Parrilli, who simply said: “We shall be at the bridge of Chiasso tomorrow at 5 p.m.”

Exactly at that hour Parrilli and Dolmann arrived by car at the frontier post indicated. With them sure enough, were Ferruccio Parri, his wife, and Usmiani.

“Tell your friends that I have kept my promise,” said Dolmann. “We shall soon meet again.”

From that time on, the cautious parleys and contacts continued until finally a trip to Switzerland was planned for General Wolf himself. Thus it was that on the eighth of March, as though by pure coincidence, two men met in a compartment of the Chiasso-Zurich express. The other compartments on either side were reserved and empty. The men were Professor Hussmann and General Wolf.

Throughout the night their conversation continued. General Wolf insinuated that Kesselring himself was aware of the real purpose of his trip. He added that he was anxious to speak directly with an American. Hussmann told him he would do his best. Dulles was the man, of course, though it was not easy to drag him into these conversations.

However, Dulles eventually agreed to see Wolf. They met in Dulles’ home, at first the three together, later Dulles and Wolf alone. Wolf promised to put forth his utmost efforts towards hastening an unconditional surrender of German troops in Italy, and to stop any eventual destruction of industries and factories. The American, for his part, made no promises, but expressed the strong likelihood that much of Wolf’s future depended on the success of his part of the bargain.

After this Wolf left Switzerland by car, and returned to

Milan with Dolmann, Parrilli and Wolf's *aide de camp*, Lieutenant Zimmer. On the way, by chance, their car was attacked by an Allied plane. The chauffeur was killed and General Wolf slightly wounded. Next day, with grotesque German humour, Wolf sent his bullet-ridden coat as a gift to Gaevernitz.

When they finally reached Milan they found bad news awaiting them. Kesselring was no longer there. While Wolf was in Zurich a German plane sent from Berlin had "picked him up". Without time even to take leave of his fellow officers, he had been rushed to the Eastern front to assume command of the army facing the Russians.

This was a most disagreeable surprise for Wolf. He had counted on Kesselring's tolerance, if not active support. He began to wonder if Himmler was not behind this abrupt transfer. Had his informers in Switzerland given him a hint of what was going on?

Meanwhile, two Allied generals from Headquarters in Caserta reached Zurich, summoned by Dulles. They were Generals Airey and Lemnitzer, the first an Englishman, the second an American. Baron Parrilli, for his part continued his frequent trips across the frontier.

On the nineteenth of March, Wolf, for the second time, came to Switzerland, where he met there two Allied generals. They chose Ascona, on the eastern bank of Lake Maggiore, for their rendezvous; it was conveniently near the frontier. They gathered in a small villa belonging to Gaevernitz and there they planned the details of what was now frankly recognized as unconditional surrender.

But, on his return to his headquarters in Fasano, Wolf got a threatening telephone call from Himmler himself. What Himmler said was something like this: "I am glad to hear that you have returned to your post. I merely wish to inform you that your family and that of Colonel Dolmann have been taken back to Germany, where they are under my *personal protection* and supervision. I shall call you from time to time to inquire how you are, and give you news of your family. Meanwhile I forbid you, for any reason whatsoever, to leave Italian territory."

Wolf wanted to throw in his hand. He called Parrilli and told him he would have to abstain from any further activity. The Baron, seeing his efforts fading away, did his utmost to convince Wolf he must go on. Germany's end was close, he said, and Wolf's only hope of personal salvation now lay in going through with the plans agreed upon.

Wolf saw the point and at last agreed to proceed, though with redoubled precautions. A secret radio transmitter was installed in Lieutenant Zimmer's house to enable Wolf to maintain his contacts with the Allies.

Himmler, however, was ever vigilant. He called Wolf on the telephone unexpectedly to verify if he was on the spot, and on the thirteenth of April summoned him urgently to General Headquarters in Berlin to report. Wolf took leave of his friends, and made his will.

On the nineteenth, however, he turned up again, with a brief but dramatic story. He had had a stormy interview with Himmler, but had got the best of it. Times were getting difficult for the Gestapo chief too, and probably an open breach with Wolf would have been most inopportune. Nevertheless, Himmler succeeded in handing Wolf on to Hitler, to make a report "on the real situation in Italy".

Hitler received Wolf at four-thirty on the morning of April 18th. The Führer had not had a wink of sleep during the night, and looked completely worn out. Wolf reported the Italian situation in Himmler's presence, describing the impossibility of maintaining the occupation of Italy and advising evacuation. He afterwards told Parrilli that Hitler had listened without a word, and at the end had merely repeated what by then was his only hope—that of separating Russia from her Western allies.

The effect on Wolf's mind was to confirm his belief that Germany, as well as northern Italy, was lost. So he continued feverishly to pursue his contacts, not only with the Anglo-Americans through Hussmann, but with the Committee of Liberation through Cardinal Schuster. The Committee chose a plenipotentiary, the barrister Marazza, of the Christian Democratic party, who acted as intermediary between the Cardinal and the General until the surrender was definite.

Events soon came to a climax. Alexander was rapidly advancing. Allied troops were marching on Verona. The partisans were gaining control of all the important Italian centres.

Wolf's orders were carried out; the Germans offered little resistance.

On April 24 Gaevernitz and Wolf had a final and conclusive meeting in the frontier town of Chiasso. They made the following arrangements:

1. Wolf would go as soon as possible to the German Commander-in-Chief in Italy, General Vietinghoff, and would if necessary use force to oblige him, simultaneously with certain strategical movements of Allied and patriot troops, to surrender unconditionally, regardless of any orders that might be forthcoming from Berlin.

2. Wolf would personally guarantee the arrest of Hitler or Himmler, should either seek refuge in Italy.

3. Any order from Himmler to kill political prisoners would be disregarded.

4. Should the Wehrmacht generals oppose an unconditional surrender Wolf would use force to make them submit.

5. The SS troops would abstain from any destruction.

On his return from Chiasso, Wolf went with Dolmann to the Archbishop's Palace to meet the patriot representatives. The cardinal and Parrilli were both present; and the clauses of the treaty were confirmed.

As they were leaving, Wolf gave Parrilli a written order to be delivered to General Rauff, the Gestapo commandant, in Milan at a given hour on April 25th, the date set for the general uprising of the partisans. In this order, Wolf, who was about to go to Bolzano to see General Vietinghoff, repeated his command to abstain from destruction, and forbade any resistance to the patriots' occupation of Milan.

Rumours of the treaty had by this time reached the Republican Government, which panicked. Two of the members, Pavolini and Liverani, went to Mussolini in his lakeside villa and persuaded him to come to Milan and find out just what was going on.

But already that day, in a little Milanese pawnshop, the first

overtures between Mussolini's delegate Cella, a local engineer, and the Liberation Committee's delegate, the lawyer Marazza, had taken place. Marazza himself has described the scene to me—this excited negotiation behind the counter as an old woman came in to pledge a gold medallion and another to redeem her sad-looking fur coat.

"What are the terms I must take to Mussolini?" asked Cella.

"None," replied Marazza. "Tell him to give himself up with his men. They will be protected. Then matters can be discussed. Meanwhile we shall have avoided useless bloodshed."

But Cella pleaded for some compromise, and in the end it was agreed that he should try to persuade Mussolini to come personally to the Archbishop's Palace, there, in the presence of the cardinal, to face the Liberation Committee.

The two men took leave of each other. The streets of Milan were quiet. The insurrection had not yet begun.

Cella hastened to Mussolini, and we do not know whether it was easy for him to persuade him to come to Milan. But by the time Pavolini and Liverani had arrived, the Duce had agreed to do so.

Marazza, for his part, reported to the Committee next morning. They were hidden in the Salesian monastery in the Via Copernico, making the final arrangements for the insurrection. They agreed to meet Mussolini that evening, in the presence of the cardinal.

By six o'clock the archiepiscopal reception rooms were indeed a strange spectacle. They were thronged with soldiers in German and Italian uniform, priests, Fascist officials and civilians. News of the impending sensational meeting had spread through the city, and a crowd of inquisitive spectators had gathered.

In the cardinal's private study Mussolini, with Graziani and his two Ministers Barracu and Zerbino, was already waiting. His Eminence has recorded that he made use of the opportunity to speak to Benito Mussolini about things not of this world—with what effect, no human chronicler can say.

In the spacious courtyard below, luxurious limousines were lined up beside military lorries and motor-cycles. At the entrance two German SS sentries were on guard.

Silently the crowd in the main hall made way for a small group of men in civilian clothes accompanied by a priest, Don Biechierai. The party hurried up the staircase towards the cardinal's study. They were the Liberation Committee delegates—Marazza, Lombardi and Count Annoni. They were followed by a general in uniform, Raffaele Cadorna, whom the Allies had nominated Commander of the Volunteers of Liberty.

These were the leaders of the Resistance, emerging now for the first time in two years. They disappeared into the cardinal's study—and came face to face with the leaders of beaten Fascism.

The walls of the room were covered with crimson damask. In the middle was a large oval table, on which—Marazza can see it to this day—were set some biscuits and glasses of marsala.

The Cardinal raised his hand for the delegates to kiss his ring, and then presented them to the fallen dictator. Mussolini, smiling with a vague sort of condescension, held out his hand. The delegates, overawed somewhat by the cardinal's presence, took it.

Into the quiet room came the distinct sound of firing. It was the insurrection getting under way in the suburbs of Busto, Gallarate and Legnano.

The "plenipotentiaries" sat round the table, the cardinal and Mussolini being together at one end.

This is how Marazza has told me the discussion proceeded:

Mussolini (addressing Marazza): Well then, what are your proposals?

Marazza: My instructions are limited and precise. I have only to ask and to accept your unconditional surrender.

Mussolini: I'm not here for that! (He turns indignantly to the cardinal). I was told we were to meet to discuss and agree upon conditions. That's why I came—to safeguard my men, their families and the Fascist Militia. I must know what's to become of them. The families of the members of my Government must be assembled at Varese and given protection. The Militia must not be disarmed. I was assured they'd be sent to Valtellina and handed to the Allied authorities as prisoners of war.

Lombardi: These are details. I believe we have authority to deal with them.

Mussolini: Well, in that case we can come to some agreement.

Graziani (interrupting energetically): No, no, Duce! Let me remind you that we have obligations of loyalty towards our Ally. We can't abandon the Germans. We can't forget the laws of duty and honour.

Marazza (quietly but very deliberately): I'm afraid the Germans don't seem to have been troubled by the same scruples. They've been parleying with us for surrender terms for the last four days. We've already agreed on all details, and we are expecting news of the signed treaty at any moment. Haven't they even bothered to inform your Government?

Marazza's revelation was a great blow. Mussolini seemed to wince. Then he regained control of himself.

"Impossible!" he said. "Show me the treaty."

Cardinal Schuster gently intervened.

"It is true," he said. "I myself was the very channel for the negotiations which will save the remaining resources of our country as well as thousands of human lives."

He beckoned to Don Bicchierai and asked him to read the main points of the agreement. The little assembly listened intently to the monotonous chanting of the priest:

". . . diplomatic guarantees for consular and diplomatic officials. Protection for German civilians, who will be handed over to the Allied authorities. German troops to be disarmed and handed over to the German authorities. The Germans will disarm the Fascist Militia and hand them over as prisoners of war. Respect for all Italian industrial plant and public works. . . ."

Mussolini's last hope had gone.

"Very well," he said, after a pause. "I accept all, but I must first go to the Germans. I must tell them what I think of all this. I want to face them with their own betrayal in my hand. I must go to those who for five years considered us traitors. Then I will return to sign anything you wish."

The cardinal was opposed to this. He was afraid that Mussolini would compromise him before the actual signing of the treaty. But Mussolini insisted.

"I will go straight to the Germans," he said. "In one hour I will come back—one hour precisely."

Once again the ex-dictator and the representatives of the coming insurrection shook hands. Mussolini started off on his way through the inquisitive onlookers in the hall below.

The Cardinal commented: "He will be back when he is really convinced the Germans have betrayed him."

It was fifteen minutes past seven. The delegates settled down to wait, and the Cardinal withdrew to his private quarters. Various people came into the room. Among them was Tiengo, the former Fascist prefect of Turin, who had been sent by General Diamanti, Commander of the Fascist Militia, to see how matters stood. Unobtrusively he sidled into a corner.

One by one all the members of the National Liberation Committee arrived. Then came General Wolf, bringing confirmation of the German surrender. There was a general buzz of excitement and discussion.

Marazza consulted his watch. There were twenty minutes more to go.

At that moment a man rushed into the room. He was Sandro Pertini, a labour leader. He had just come from a meeting at the O.M. motor factory, where the workers were in arms. He said there had been a skirmish, and two workers had been killed.

"Where is Mussolini?" he asked excitedly. "What is all this loss of time? Once Mussolini has been handed over to us, two days will be enough to arrange a people's tribunal to condemn him to the same end to which he has sent so many others. Summary justice is what we want. Enough of this parleying!"

Mazzara objected to this outburst. "If Mussolini surrenders to us," he said, "we must keep our word."

A heated discussion followed. In the middle of it Tiengo tiptoed from his corner and slipped out. He ran to warn Mussolini.

We do not know what passed between Mussolini and the Germans. But we do know that after that meeting, coming down the steps of the Prefecture with the evident intention of returning to the Archbishop's Palace, he met the panting Tiengo.

It was a fateful meeting. Mussolini threw away his last chance either of safety or of a dignified end. He went back into the Prefecture, gathered his trembling "Government" about him, and, stealing out by the back door, drove off by car towards Lake Como and Germany. He did not reach Germany.

Only Teruzzi refused to follow. General Attilio Teruzzi stayed to face the music in Milan, and on April 30th was arrested. Imprisonment saved him, for there was a hue and

cry after him when it was known that he was still in the city. When Mussolini returned, dead, to be hanged by the mob in the Piazzale Loreto, a corpse was suspended beside him wearing Teruzzi's square beard and labelled with his name. It was not Teruzzi but an innocent jeweller of the city whose appearance, in this moment of mad frenzy, was tragically against him.

And another dead man in Milan that day was Tiengo—the faithful Tiengo who had been Mussolini's last sincere adviser, though his advice was fatally wrong. An unidentified machine-gun cut him down in the street.

In the meantime, while Mussolini and his doomed gangsters were speeding northwards, Wolf had reached the Brenner, where Vietinghoff's decision was necessary to make the surrender effective. Wolf said afterwards that he had a tough struggle in his talks there, and even had to threaten the generals with his SS escorts. But in the end he gained his point, and, without sleep, immediately dashed off to Zurich. There Dulles, ready at last to come into the open, undertook that the Allied plenipotentiaries were ready to assemble to sign the armistice.

Wolf returned to Fasano, and waited, surrounded by his SS troops. He was not allowed to stay there, for a complicated procedure followed. The Allies insisted that the German plenipotentiaries should come to their headquarters at Caserta. They drove down by car to Annecy in French Savoy, whither Field Marshal Alexander had sent a plane to take them to the historic ceremony in the royal palace at Caserta. The formal armistice was signed on April 29th, at three in the afternoon.

This was not all. Vietinghoff's countersignature was necessary. So Wolf and Dolmann flew back to Annecy, and began motoring through the length of Switzerland. Dulles awaited them at Berne, where, seeing them covered with dust and completely exhausted, his sense of humour got the better of him, and he exclaimed "It is indeed easier to start a war than to end one".

Himmler had given orders to intercept Wolf and Dolmann, and destroy the instrument of surrender. They therefore passed through the independent State of Liechtenstein, and crossed

into Italy by the little-known mountain pass of Rechen-Scheideck.

At Bolzano they found that Berlin had played its last card. Vietinghoff had been relieved of his command of the German armies in Italy. But the order had not yet been transmitted to the staff. Wolf and Dolmann decided that his signature would be accepted. It was. At midnight on May 1st, the hour demanded by Alexander, the order to Cease Fire went out to all the German troops south of the Alps. Italy's long martyrdom was over.

That very evening Churchill declared in the House of Commons: "The negotiations for surrender in northern Italy have been conducted for some time in a reserved manner. There were times in which they seemed to allow for more hope than at other moments, but for two days now I have known that the surrender was imminent."

Wolf and Dolmann, at any rate, had saved their own skins.

AN OLD PRIEST WRITES THE EPILOGUE

IN THE LITTLE study of his parsonage on the banks of Lake Como an old parish priest wrote a report to his bishop. Chewing his pen and frowning, he often found it difficult to choose the right word. He was no literary stylist, this excellent old *parroco*, and what he was describing was far outside his normal record of christenings and Easter Communions, or his oft-repeated appeal for diocesan help in repairing the church roof. It was, in fact, the terrible story of the last writhings of a fallen Caesar, the awful spectacle of the tyrant Mussolini's desperate efforts to escape his doom.

For Don Enea Mainetti, parish priest of the quiet lakeside village appropriately named Musso, had spent an extraordinary three days. From the moment when, on April 27th, 1945, just as he was finishing Mass, a convoy of lorries pulled up in the village street, the old man found himself caught up in one of the grimmest and most pathetic dramas of European history. It all happened before his eyes, or was breathlessly told him by his excited parishioners, or by other countryfolk in the neighbouring familiar hills.

For three days his life was one whirl of conflicting impressions. Then, when all was over, he went back into his humble presbytery, made up his arrears in saying his office, and wrote his report to the bishop of Como.

I have seen a copy of this report, which the bishop has now seen fit to distribute privately to his clergy. Here I give extracts from it, translated straight from Don Mainetti's atrocious Italian.

When I first read it the story gripped me. It grips me still. There is something horribly fascinating in watching the playing out to the last of a terrible tragedy through the eyes of a simple good old man.

The story starts at sunrise on April 26th, in the neighbouring village of Menaggio. It is the day the Germans in Italy

unconditionally surrendered and the day after Mussolini had disappeared from Milan, where the Committee of National Liberation has taken control.

"They say that at 7 a.m. Menaggio was aroused by the rumble of a long column of cars coming from the direction of Como," the old priest wrote. "The cars draw up in front of the Hotel Principe and stop with a jerk of brakes that shows the nervousness of the drivers. The hotel is occupied by the Republican Fascist Central Office of Statistics.

"Well-known figures pile out of the cars. They gather in the hotel garden. At their head, Mussolini and Marshal Graziani. Ministers, officials, and uniformed officers follow closely behind. A young woman in a grey suit is among them, Claretta Petacci."

The old priest nearly always refers in his report to Mussolini's mistress by the diminutive "Claretta". He refuses to dignify her by the name "Clara".

"While Mussolini breakfasts in the hotel mess, Graziani paces up and down and sips a cup of the usual bad coffee.

"The villagers send boys up to our village to bring the news to our partisans.

"They say that outside the Menaggio hotel, when a truck starts its motor roaring, Graziani shouts: 'Enemy aircraft! Keep cover under the trees!' In his agitation, he trips, falls, gets up and rushes into the hotel."

The narrator goes on to describe what he has been told of the attitudes of the various people gathered in the garden of Menaggio's small hotel. Mussolini, having finished his breakfast, joined Graziani in the garden. A lively argument seems to have started between the two men, and their conversation terminated abruptly. Graziani tersely called his men, and with no word of "good-bye", jumped into his car and drove back towards Como followed by his escort of motor-cycled Carabinieri.

Mussolini and his followers remained. Not until afternoon did they decide to pass the night at Grandola, base of Squadron X of the M.A.S. unit. There the surrounding fields were still mined and the place could be defended from a possible attack.

"Mussolini drives his own car, an Alfa Romeo, with Nicola Bombacci beside him. Claretta with her brother Marcello follows in a second Alfa Romeo.¹ After them, the other members of the Republican Government.

"They pass the night in the Hotel Miramare at Grandola. On the following day, April 27th, a German armoured column arrives at the break of dawn with orders to escort them towards the German frontier.

"At 5.30 a.m. thirty-two German lorries with a tank leading them start off on the northern lake road towards Dongo. The Italians split up and hide in various lorries. One of the Fascists, Barracu, gets aboard the tank.²

"Just as the lorries are starting a civilian motorcycle overtakes them. It is driven by the partisan Andrea Bozzetti who has kept watch during the night and is now hurrying forward to warn his companions along the road and in the surrounding hills.

"As the procession is about to enter my village of Musso, the tank in front halts abruptly. The lorries pull up in lines along the country road bordered by a row of tiny houses. The way out of the village has been barricaded and the tank has stopped in front of a huge mass of rocks and logs. Rifles are facing the Germans from behind the hastily built barricades."

What happened next Don Mainetti saw from the steps of his own parish church.

"As the German commander of the column dashes towards the barricade to find out what is going on, a few shots are fired. German soldiers jump down from the lorries and put up their machine-guns for action.

"The fighting however dies down quickly. Our partisans, many of them armed only with shotguns, are not prepared to face a tank. The Germans, for their part, prefer bargaining,

¹ Marcello Petacci was known during the last years of Fascism as the leader of the "Petacci group", racketeers who, in exploiting the dictator's senile passion for Claretta, had organized in Italy and in the Iberian Peninsula a vast network of dubious but highly profitable commercial enterprises. He was despised yet feared even in the most Fascist circles.

² Barracu, Under-Secretary to the Presidency in the Republican Government, was the man who had used the Himmlerian method of reprisals against the families of officials who adhered to Badoglio's Government.

and are in a hurry to get on. The body of the only victim, Antonio Apolloni, foreman of Scalini's Construction Company, a partisan squad commander, lies on the roadside.

"A German soldier approaches me and addresses me in Latin. He says that he is a Protestant pastor and asks me 'in the name of Christian charity' to do what I can to obtain a transit for the Germans, who have no belligerent intentions. I ask if there are any Italians in the party, and the German commander, who has now returned from the skirmish, declares on his word as a soldier that there are not. So I go off to find our patriots.

"Another German comes up to me. He wears an ambulance orderly's uniform, and says he is a Catholic priest of Austrian nationality, who had obtained his degree at the Antoniana in Padua. 'There are Italians,' he whispers—'about twenty of them. Don't believe the commander, and search the lorries.'

"To gain time, I tell the German officer I will do what I can, and start off to the mountains of Santa Eufemia to the local partisan headquarters. Here, however, I find that news of the true situation has not only already arrived but has been sent on to the General Command of the patriots in Morbegno.

"I return to Musso, where I find the situation static. The tank is still in front of the barricade which has been reinforced by other patriots. German soldiers have left their lorries in search of food and water. The village road is crowded with onlookers, young and old.

"Finally some of the Italians decide to give themselves up, hoping for my protection. First to come to my parsonage is Nicola Bombacci. 'Useless to pretend any longer. I am Bombacci. There are a number of Italians here. I am ready to give myself up to the partisans, but quietly, however. Will you help me, Father?'

"I lead him into the house. His example is soon followed by others, and in my dining-room are gathered the Ministers Zerbino, Augusto Liverani, Fernando Mezzasoma and Ruggero Romano with his fifteen-year-old son Costantino. Romano entrusts his son to me. Some time later Daquanno, editor of the Stefani News Agency, joins the others, escorting Claretta. Mussolini, however, does not appear.

"It is now past one o'clock. I manage to get some soup for the fugitives.

"Partisans arrive at the parsonage with Captain Barbieri in command, and a sergeant of the Alpine regiment Carlo Bellati.

"Captain Barbieri tries to discover if Mussolini is in the lorries. Romano says 'He was with us in Menaggio, but since then he has vanished'. Bombacci, however, approaches my sister and says: 'He is with us, hidden somewhere. It isn't fair that he should get away.'

"Mezzasoma,¹ most excited of all, nervously wipes his spectacles and talks in an animated way. He wants to hear of the political tendencies of the partisans in the northern lake district. He declares that there are only two political currents now alive and vigorous in Italy—Communism and Christian Democracy. He admits that Republican Fascism has made many errors, and lays the blame strongly on Pavolini.

"The contacts between the Italian Social Republic and the Germans,' he says, 'were recently very strained. A quarrel between Hitler and Mussolini finally resulted in an exchange of insulting letters.'

"Meanwhile Captain Count Bellinco dalle Stelle, commander of the 52nd Garibaldi Patriots Brigade arrived in the village from Dongo, bearer of precise orders from the patriot H.Q. The Germans may pass on, but their cars will have to undergo a thorough search in Dongo. The Italians and the tank would have to remain for the moment in Musso under a patriot guard.

"Negotiations are carried on by the patriots' interpreter, a Swiss, Hofman Aloys. The Germans accept the terms.

"When the Fascist chiefs realize they are to be abandoned they barricade themselves in the tank. Barracu, from the turret, tries to persuade the patriots to let them pass. He states that they have no intention of absconding, but are on their way to Trieste to defend that super-Italian city.

"The patriots remain firmly bent on executing their orders. The Germans are merely concerned with their own safety, and desirous of avoiding an armed conflict at all costs. The

¹ Fernando Mezzasoma, Minister of Information in the Republican Government.

tank is forced to pull up to the side of the road. The heavy barricade is moved aside and the German lorries start forward. The patriots meantime have been reinforced by others from Cremia and Pianello del Lario.

"The German Commander's car passes by, and Barracu, his face livid, shouts, 'Cowards, cowards!'

"During these manoeuvres, the Fascists start firing from the tank. The patriots answer with hand grenades. The combat, led by Captain dalle Stelle, grows more intense and lasts about twenty minutes.

"Finally, a white rag is hoisted on the tank's turret. The Fascists, two of them wounded, emerge. During the skirmish Pavolini had managed to get away. A hunting party starts after him. After an hour, two of the searchers from their row-boat on the lake spy someone hidden behind the rocks. They shoot. Pavolini, wounded in the back, emerges, his arms waving, to surrender."

Meanwhile, the German column moved on to the partisan headquarters at Dongo, followed by two young partisans on motor-cycles, Franco Cappelletti and Sergio Rumi, who later told Don Mainetti they were convinced Mussolini was hidden in the lorries. The investigation at Dongo, however, revealed nothing.

"The partisans are just about to give the order to pass," added Don Mainetti, quoting his young informants, "when land-surveyor Mottarella, partisan, re-examining lorry, plate number W.H. 529,507, suspicious of a heap of old blankets at the feet of the driver, investigates and finds a man hidden, in a German uniform. The driver, in poor Italian, tries to explain that it is a friend of his, too drunk to sit up. Mottarella, taking a closer look at the man's face, calls out to his commander: 'Doctor Giacobbe! Here! Here! We've found him! It is the Duce!'

"Mussolini does not say a word, shows no resistance. Mottarella and Partisan Ugo Torri hold him up as he stumbles out of the lorry, his eyes half closed from hours of darkness under the blankets.

"He wears a German lieutenant's coat and the cap of a Wehrmacht soldier.

"‘I thought I was going to suffocate’ are his first words. Then ‘The Germans have betrayed me for the second time’. As he enters the Town Hall of Dongo ‘I shan’t try to escape this time. I know that in Dongo no one will harm me.’

"Little by little the arrested men are rounded up in the Town Hall of Dongo where they are received by the Mayor, Signor Rubini. On the ground floor Mussolini, Claretta, Casalnuovo, Barracu, Porta, Pavolini, Bombacci are put in the same room. On the second floor the others.

"At five o'clock in the afternoon, Sergeant Boffelli brings orders to transfer Clara Petacci and Mussolini to a safer spot. They are to be taken to one of the fortified crypts of Dongo where the Germasino village customs guards have their barracks.

"Before they leave, Boffelli asks Mussolini if he wants to put on the German coat in which he was arrested. ‘I don’t even want to look at a German uniform again’ is the answer. Somebody lends him some blue overalls.

"Claretta is chiefly annoyed over a ladder in her stocking, and over a finger-nail broken during the uncomfortable trip. Her only words are: ‘It seems to be my bad luck, that this should happen to me as well.’

"As soon as the new destination is reached, where Mussolini and she are put into separate rooms, she asks for a bath and a nail file. Neither wish can be granted. Towards midnight, as she can find no rest on the straw mattress thrown on the floor, she asks for some cognac.

"At three a.m. the next day, April 28th, an order comes through from Milan to transfer the two prisoners once again. They are taken to an isolated farm owned by Lia de Maria near Azzano in Tremezzino.¹

¹ Five months later the journalist Bruno Romani visited the room where Mussolini and Claretta Petacci passed the last night of their lives. The room was exactly as it had been left on the evening of April 28th: "In one corner a washstand with a used towel and one untouched. Beside it, on a chest covered with a cloth, there was a tray with two white cups and two pieces of bread. Hanging on a wooden peg were the blue overalls that Mussolini wore on arrival. The bed was very high with a woollen mattress. The white spread covering the sheets was perfectly clean. At the foot a military blanket lay folded. On the left, where Mussolini had slept, there were two cushions. Madame Petacci had slept with only one pillow."

"Meanwhile, the other prisoners are all together in the 'Golden Chamber' of Dongo's Town Hall. Barracu is the most nervous. He asks for pen and paper and remarks: 'Too many now in power in Rome will be with me in the dock! Then indeed there will be some fun!' Pavolini, suffering from his wound, is feverish. Porta lights cigarette after cigarette. Romano, on his knees, prays in a corner of the room.

"Another prisoner arrives, Claretta's brother, Marcello. When arrested he tried to pass himself off as an attaché of the Spanish Embassy. None of the prisoners speak to him. His attempts to talk to Liverani are met with a cold reception.

"At noon food is brought from a near-by tavern, but remains almost untouched. Every ten minutes Romano turns to the captain of the guard and inquires: 'Have your orders come yet? What has Milan decided?' He is worried over his son, but finds relief in a brief note from me informing him that the boy is safe in an abbey in Dongo.

"In the early hours of the afternoon, Colonel Valerio of the partisans' regular troops arrives from Milan in a lorry with twenty-four men commanded by a lieutenant. The Colonel (in his private life Signor Giovanbattista Magnoli, active member of the Communist Party) brings a sentence of death on all the prisoners, pronounced by the National Committee of Liberation in Milan. He is accompanied by Comrade Guido, representative of the Communist Party at the General Command of the Volunteers, and bears a pass issued by Captain Daddario of the American military mission in Milan.

"The Abbot of Dongo, Father Accurzio, goes to Colonel Valerio and asks permission to prepare the doomed men for death and give them the comforts of religion. 'Go ahead, Father Abbot, but, be sharp. I've got orders to finish this as quickly as possible,' replies the Colonel.

"It is Father Accurzio's duty to inform the prisoners of the death sentence. This he does at 5 p.m. At about six o'clock, Colonel Valerio enters the room where the prisoners are gathered, accompanied by Captain dalle Stelle and Lieutenant Giacobbe Nanci. He reads the sentence aloud.

"Shortly after, the procession leaves the Town Hall with Father Accurzio leading. Following him, Pavolini, supported

by a partisan, then Porta, Barracu, Bombacci, Casalnuovo, Zerbino, Mezzasoma and Daquanno. The last are Liverani and Romano.

"The prisoners are lined up along the north side of the square facing the lake. Only a few onlookers peer through the line of soldiers. It is raining.

"The condemned men obtain permission to be untied. From their midst a murmur of protest arises. Colonel Valerio draws near and inquires. Liverani asks, for all of them, that Marcello Petacci be shot separately. 'We are ready to pay, but we don't want his blood mixed with ours. We don't want to be contaminated in death.' Valerio grants the wish, and Petacci is led away from the line to be executed later alone.

"The firing squad is ready. Father Accurzio raises his arm and says 'Lift up your souls to God. Ask forgiveness for your sins. May the mercy of the Lord receive your souls. In His name I absolve you.'

"The doomed men bend and cross themselves. Romano and Liverani, who have asked for the last Sacraments, and have been unable to obtain them as time was pressing, kneel. Some embrace their companions, others shake hands. A curt order brings them back into line, facing the lake. Standing at attention, the lieutenant turns to Colonel Valerio, who calls out: 'Fire!'

"It is seven p.m., April 28th.

"As the echo of the firing dies down, confusion breaks out in the corner of the square. Marcello Petacci has escaped as his guards were watching the execution and is running desperately toward the lake. One shot gets him and he falls. His dead body rolls into the lake."

Don Mainetti was a great friend of the Abbot of Dongo, and, though he does not say so in this report, was with him in that last hour when the Fascist Republic Government was mown down on the lakeside. He had joined in the fruitless efforts to gain time to give those who wished it the Last Sacraments of the Church.

That was all. Apart from a bald account, based on local hearsay, on how Mussolini himself met his death, there did not seem much that the old priest could usefully add. He

had completed the story of the end of one of the worst tyrannies the world has ever known.

Don Mainetti signed the document, therefore, stuck down the envelope, and addressed it his Right Reverend Father in God the Lord Bishop of Como. Then he went out into the garden to look at his beehives, and perhaps recite a decade of the Rosary before suppertime.

So the old priest has written the epilogue, but it is necessary to add a footnote from the hangman.

Colonel Valerio, alias Giovanbattista Magnoli di Cesare, former Milanese metalworker, clairvoyant, Communist, was either the executioner or murderer of Mussolini. The point is not yet cleared up, and Valerio's own report is studiously vague on the question. His written authority consisted of three documents, in none of which is the name of Mussolini mentioned. There was a document, signed by Colonel Pieri on behalf of the General Command of the Volunteers of Liberation, instructing Colonel Sardagna, in command of the Customs Guard at Menaggio, to provide Valerio with all news concerning the movements of Porta, Barracu, Casalnuovo, Bombacci, Pavolino and Utimbergher. Another document, unsigned, but bearing a stamp with the five-pointed star of the General Command, appointed "Magnoli Giovanbattista di Cesare" liaison officer immediately answerable to the command, and ordered all formations dependent on it to facilitate by every means "the execution of his mission". There was a third document in English to which Don Mainetti has referred, signed by Captain R. Q. Daddario of the Allied Military Commission in Milan. It stated: "Colonel Valerio (otherwise known as Magnoli Giovanbattista di Cesare) is an Italian officer belonging to the General Command of the Volunteers of Liberty. He is sent on a mission by the National Liberation Committee for Northern Italy, in Como and its province, and must therefore be allowed to circulate freely with his armed escort."

Such was all the written authority Valerio had with him when he went forth to rid Italy of her baneful dictator. If he

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had verbal instructions, they are not so far recorded. And that is why he writes pompously, at every turn, about his "mission", about "applying on the spot the Committee of National Liberation's decree against those responsible for Italy's catastrophe".

But Valerio is at least clear when he comes to describe how the "mission" was carried out.

He admits that at Dongo he met with some difficulties, his authority not being recognized at first. But he soon enlisted the aid of the Commandant of the Garibaldi Brigade, Count Bellinci dalle Stelle, who went generally by the name of "Pedro". Leaving him in charge of the other prisoners, he set off again with the ever-vigilant Guido and with "Bill", *alias* Lazzaro Guglielmo, Communist vice-commissar in the Brigade, in search of Mussolini.

They soon reached Giulino di Mezzegra, and began to climb the footpath to the isolated farmhouse where Mussolini was lodged. They entered the house with a Sten gun at the ready. Valerio went alone into the bedroom. This is how he describes the scene:

"Petacci was lying on the bed. Mussolini was up, wearing a brown mackintosh, a cap of the Republican Guard without badge, and a pair of black boots one of which had become partly unstitched. Upon my entry he turned suddenly. He seemed lost. His big eyes were staring, and his arms fell at his side.

"I didn't want any noisy scene. I was determined to get Mussolini out of the house without using force.

"The following dialogue ensued:

MUSSOLINI: What is it?

VALERIO: I have come to free you.

MUSSOLINI: Really?

VALERIO: Quick. You must be quick. We have no time to lose.

MUSSOLINI: Where are we going?

VALERIO (*ignoring this question*): Are you armed?

MUSSOLINI: No, I have no arms.

"At this point Mussolini made as though to leave the room, but I said: 'Ladies first.'

"Claretta Petacci seemed not to understand the situation. She remained under the sheets without saying a word, following my movements with a frightened eye. When I asked her to hurry up she tried hastily to collect her clothes, which were scattered on the bed.

"At last they were ready, and we left. Mussolini, when we were outside, believed himself liberated, and turned to me transfigured, saying: 'I will offer you an empire.' I did not reply, but taking Petacci's arm I hurried her along saying: 'Be quick. Be quick.' We descended the little footpath. Bill went first, then Mussolini, helping Petacci, who was incommoded by the high heels of her chamois leather shoes.

"During the descent Mussolini turned to me to ask: 'And my son?' I replied: 'Vittorio has already been freed.' Mussolini said: 'Thank you with all my heart. And Zerbino and Mezzasoma, where are they?' I replied: 'We are looking after them also.' Mussolini gave a sigh of relief.

"When we reached the car Mussolini felt himself a free man. He remembered to stand back to allow Petacci to get in first, but I pushed him in saying: 'You get in first. You won't be seen so well there, especially if you take off your Fascist cap.' Mussolini took off his cap, but passing his hand over his prominent bald skull smiled and asked: 'Just how am I going to hide this?' I replied: 'Very well Keep the cap on, but pull it down over your eyes.'

"In the front of the car were Guido and the chauffeur; behind were Mussolini and the woman. On the running-board on her side was Bill, while I sat on the mudguard on the other side covering Mussolini with my machine-gun."

Valerio's report goes on to describe the emotions he felt during the short journey that remained, and his fear that something might happen to prevent his completing "his mission". But in a moment or two the car swung round a bend in the road and drew up.

The report goes on:

"Mussolini gave me a questioning look, but I made him a sign not to move, and, putting my finger to my lips, I whispered to him: 'I heard a noise. I will go and see what it was.' I got down from the car and moved around, as though listening.

Then I returned running, and said to Mussolini, still in a whisper: 'Get out quickly, both of you, and stand in that corner of the wall.' Mussolini, although obeying quickly, seemed no longer so sure about things. I learned afterwards that during the brief stop Guido had said to him in a menacing tone 'The game is up'.

"Mussolini had become old, hesitant, tired. He was also frightened.

"When he had reached the pre-destined corner I pointed my machine-gun at him. Saying only 'I execute the will of the Italian people', I opened fire. Petacci threw herself on me crying 'You can't do that', and it was she who received the first shots. Then they both fell, back to back. But my machine-gun, after five shots, had jammed, and they were still alive. So Guido ran up and handed me his own, with which I fired five more shots.

"In this lonely corner there were four of us—Petacci, Mussolini, Guido and I. When the two first fell corpses on the damp grass we remained alone, Guido and I. No one else was there. Bill was on guard a hundred yards away round a corner of the road, and the chauffeur was out of sight the other way.

"I stooped to pick up the ten empty cartridges, and we set off towards Dongo to complete the mission entrusted to me by the General Command of the Volunteers of Liberty."

We have already seen how Valerio did so. The Americans were coming, and he had to hasten back to Milan. His famous lorry served to transport the corpses, and on the way he stopped to pick up the bodies of the Dictator of Italy and his mistress.

It was an adventurous journey, because not all the patriot commanders *en route* were satisfied with the credentials of Valerio and his grisly cargo. But in the early darkness of the morning of April 29th he arrived in the city, and there followed the nightmare gallows scene on the Piazzale Loreto, when dead men and a dead woman were executed a second time to satisfy the vengeance of the mob.

But Giovanbattista Magnoli di Cesare, alias Colonel Valerio, repaired to his office, and issued a sonorous communication to

the Press. Then he wrote up his report, as I have quoted it; and he finished with the words:

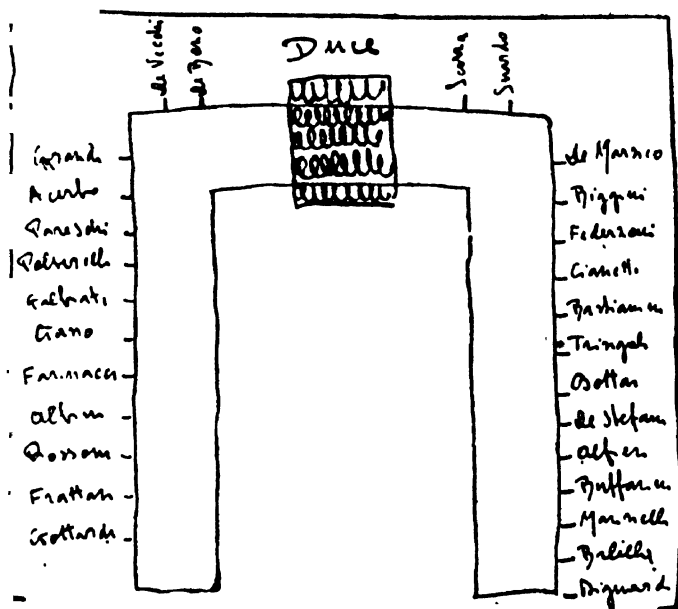
"The victorious insurrection of the people has culminated in the liquidation of those chiefly responsible for the ruin of the country, thus indicating the way of justice to be followed in order to restore to Italy her prestige as a civilized nation."

Five months later Bruno Romani, a correspondent of the *Risorgimento Liberale*, visited these lakeside villages. To his surprise he could learn very little more of what had happened there. Reluctantly the villagers would show him a bedroom, a country lock-up, a lonely spot behind a hedge. Then, after a few muttered explanations, they would fall silent and offer no impressions at all about the terrible drama that had been played out in their midst.

Bruno Romani need not have been surprised. Silence is now the way of all Italians. The masses who witnessed the long tragedy of Fascism have nothing to say. The Balcony echoes no longer, and the crowds are dumb.

This tale has not dealt with the Italian people. In all the sombre events recorded they seem to have played but a passive rôle. But in the long run they were the one decisive factor. Had it not been for them, and the knowledge of their unspoken but compelling and final judgement, no palace revolution could have ousted Mussolini and sent him to his doom. The deciding vote at the Fascist Grand Council was cast by the Italian people themselves.

Silently, at work on their farms round Dongo, as in all the countless towns and villages in the country, the Italian people bear witness to their faith in themselves. Facing a new future with new problems, new difficulties and new dangers, they are happy. They do not discuss the past. The evil dream is over, and there is work to be done.



Grandi's own sketch, made during the session, of the seating arrangements at the last fatal meeting of the Fascist Grand Council on July 24th, 1943.

Badoglio's letter to Mussolini, brought by General Ferone on the second night of his imprisonment. The annotation is in Mussolini's own handwriting.

An excerpt from the memorandum put in by Ciano at the Special Tribunal that condemned him to death. The author's state of mind is indicated by his having written on line 8 "George V" instead of "George VI."

**The first page of the indictment at the Verona trial giving
the names of the six defendants who were present.**

The second page of the indictment at the Verona trial, giving the names of the thirteen defendants tried *in absentia*.

Death sentence of the Nineteen, written by the President of the Verona Tribunal, Aldo Vecchini, and signed by the eight judges.

Letter written by the Commander of the National Republican Guard refusing to forward to Mussolini the Verona prisoners' plea for mercy, and establishing the place and hour for the execution—Tiro a Segno, 8 a.m., January 11.

**Official report of the execution of the Verona prisoners
written by the clerk of the tribunal, Leucadito.**

